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The Unesco Courier

THEATRE OF THE WORLD

Awasthi
Boal
Chitakasem
Cirilov
Cournot
Fabregas
Hayman
Kornienko
Lu Tian
Malanda
Morisseau-Leroy
Nierni
Oatman
Wassef
Yamaguchi

A time to live...

Photo © Jean Bottin, Paris

⑫ GREECE **'All the world's a stage'**

International theatre festivals, many of which include performances of ballet and opera, provide an ideal opportunity for the exchange of ideas and for experiment with new theatrical forms. Among the most famous festivals are: the *Theatre of Nations* (itinerant); *Avignon Festival* (France); the *Festival of Two Worlds,* Spoleto (Italy); the *Edinburgh Festival* (United Kingdom); the *Theatre Rally,* West Berlin; the *International Theatre Festival,* Caracas (Venezuela); the *Festival of Carthage* (Tunisia); the *Dubrovnik Summer Festival* (Yugoslavia). Above, the cast of a classical Greek tragedy rehearsing for the *Epidaurus Festival* (Greece) in the magnificent 4th-century BC theatre which can hold 14,000 spectators and is renowned for its incomparable acoustics.

The Unesco Courier

A window open on the world

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GREECE : 'All the world's a stage'

Editorial

WHETHER popular in origin like the Italian commedia dell'arte, *courtly like the* khon *theatre of Thailand, linked to ritual as in Africa, religious like the miracle plays of medieval Europe, or avowedly divine like India's* kathakali, *theatre has always been the "concentrated expression" of a culture, drawing on popular myths, legends and customs, historic ways of life and experiences, and assimilating all forms of art, human expression and communication.*

World theatre covers an immense canvas. It ranges from the dazzling spectacle of kabuki, *European opera, and North American musical comedy, to the austere settings, devoid of scenery or props, of Japanese* noh *and the "theatre of poverty" practised by the popular groups of Latin America. It may be performed in a traditional purpose-built theatre, or outdoors in streets and squares, as in parts of the USSR. It may be governed by rigorously codified conventions, like Beijing Opera, or improvised, like the avant-garde experiments of the Living Theater. It may recreate great moments from myth, religion or history, like Greek, African or Thai theatre, or become a form of direct action on behalf of marginal social groups, as in North and South America. It may vehicle a classic literary text or, as in certain works by Peter Handke and Robert Wilson, reject "the tyranny of the word". It may, as in India, Egypt and China, continue an ancient dramatic tradition, or it may systematically cast tradition aside (as in the countries of the West where it could be said that rejection of tradition has almost become a tradition in itself). In every case theatre has always triggered the creative capacity of the individual and the community and provided a mirror of identity.*

Theatre is also a meeting place for different cultures, and a vehicle for their enrichment. Sophocles' Antigone *has been transposed into Creole language and Afro-Haitian beliefs, Shakespeare's* Macbeth *into the expressive forms of India's Yakshagana theatre, Brecht's* Caucasian Chalk Circle *into the traditions of Georgia, and works of Sophocles and Aristophanes have been adapted to the distinctive political situation of Catalonia. Theatre is a place for reaffirmation and assertion of cultural identity. While such Oriental techniques as those of* kabuki *are being adopted in Europe, Shakespeare is performed in a production influenced by Chinese circus, and Peter Brook takes an international troupe of actors to African villages, Third World countries which send the best of their traditional theatre to international festivals are using the latest avant-garde techniques to recreate, denounce, and dramatize their own situations.*

These and other aspects of world theatre are examined in this issue of the Unesco Courier, *in the light of the belief that this total art is one of the finest expressions of Unesco's overriding ideal: the promotion of mutual comprehension between peoples through knowledge of the immense variety of their cultures and forms of expression, eschewing hierarchies and invidious value judgments.*

Cover: below, mask of Dionysos (1st century AD), Louvre Museum, Paris: Photo © Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris. Centre : African mask (Zaire), Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre, Kinshasa: Photo © Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Above: Noh mask (Japan): Photo C. Lemzaouda © Musée de l'Homme collection, Paris.

LATIN AMERICA

A theatre of urgency

by Augusto Boal

LATIN American theatre should not be considered from the standpoint or in terms of the values of European theatre. It should be understood within its own context as part of the Latin American situation.

Latin America is a diverse, many-faceted continent. This variety may be seen, for example, in its ethnic composition. In some Latin American countries which have a large proportion of indigenous peoples, there were highly developed cultures when the first European invaders arrived with Christopher Columbus, Pedro Alvares Cabral and others. The Incas inhabited Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. Such peoples as the Aztecs, the Mayas, the Toltecas and the Chichimecas lived in Mexico. In other countries such as Brazil, already inhabited by Indians in the Stone Age, the Portuguese invaders decimated the indigenous population, and in Brazil and Uruguay today the Indian presence is virtually unnoticeable.

On the other hand, the influence of the black cultures brought by slaves from Africa is immense in such countries as Venezuela, but almost non-existent in Argentina. The influence which European economic exiles have contributed to Latin America is similarly diverse: Italian is spoken in entire districts of Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires and other cities; 90 per cent of the population of the Brazilian city of Marilia are Japanese or their direct descendants; in some cities of the Brazilian State of Santa Caterina, German is the language you will hear in the street.

Economically the differences are no less great. There is the well-known example of Rio de Janeiro: in the hills a few hundred metres away from the luxurious apartment blocks of Copacabana beach is the desperate poverty of the *favelas*. Several million people are concentrated in a handful of big cities, while millions more live scattered over millions of square kilometres. Immense wealth is concentrated in select quarters of a few cities, while the grip of poverty reaches far over the mountains of the *altiplano*, Amazonia and the waste expanses of northeastern Brazil.

There is one fundamental reason for this massive disparity: the inequality in economic relations between North and South which reduces the majority of Latin Americans to inhuman living conditions.

And so Latin America is both homogeneous, principally because of the ills that beset it, and diverse in its social, economic and geographical composition. These simultaneously identical and distinct societies produce a theatre which is simultaneously the same and different.

The theatre standardized by North-South relations in the great capitals of Latin America is the same as that you will find in the capitals of Europe and in New York; the same West End comedies, with the same music, sometimes with the same choreography and décor, carbon copies of their originals.

Fortunately there is another theatre, the popular theatre, which is as diverse as the peoples which populate our America and which must adapt itself to the conditions in which it is produced.

The story of the Bolivian director Liber Forti is instructive. He became used to working in extremely precarious conditions and with slender means, and put on shows wherever he could, including the open air. He staged performances in the mountains where there was no electricity, for the tin miners of Catavi and Siglo Veinte. There was no point in holding performances during the daytime when the miners were at work, and so he decided to ask the audience to light up the stage using their miners' lamps. "For the actors," said Forti, "this was a remarkable way of finding out whether a scene was any good dramatically; when the miners were bored with the action the lighting dropped off, and when something interesting was happening the stage was more brightly lit."

When I talked with Luis Valdez, who directs California's *Teatro Campesino*, and with the director of a remarkably interesting Mexican group called *Los Vendedores Ambulantes de Puebla* ("the travelling salesmen of Puebla"—the members of the company actually are salesmen from the Mexican town of Puebla who use theatre to denounce their working conditions), I realized that we had all three found similar solutions to identical problems. I told them

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AUGUSTO BOAL, *of Brazil, is the author of many dramatic works, including* The Great International Agreement of Scrooge Mack Duck, *and essays on the "theatre of the oppressed" which have been translated into a number of languages. Among the groups he has directed are the* Teatro Arena *of Sao Paulo (Brazil), the* Grupo Machete *(Argentina), and the* Grupo la Barraca *(Portugal). He is currently director of the* Centre d'étude et diffusion des techniques actives d'expression (Méthode Boal) *in Paris.*

Photo © Hamid Belmenouar, Paris

A scene from *White Dream* produced at the Tabarka Festival (Tunisia) by Graziella Martinez's theatre and dance company from Argentina.

how, when we were working in Brazil, we were so poor that we had to make do with discarded objects as décor and props. When we presented Lope de Vega's play *El Mejor Alcalde, El Rey*, the nobles' costumes were made from old carpets we found on the municipal rubbish dump, and things of that kind. Valdez told me that he and his group had done the same thing and that they had called their production "rascuachi" (poor, meagre, worthless). We felt a certain pride at having created beauty from filth. Our Mexican friend told us that they had done the same thing at Puebla, "except that we never gave a name to this form of presentation. We used garbage because we had nothing else."

Popular Latin American theatre is a theatre of urgency. Plays are usually chosen or improvised in accordance with local social needs. Theatre is used as a form of debate and protest, to stimulate awareness and to help in working out tactics. The social and political nature of a play is never ignored, even in the case of major works from the international repertory. For example, Molière's *Tartuffe* was used to denounce "parareligious" groups of the extreme right which were using the same methods as Tartuffe, that is transforming God the Supreme Arbiter into a partner in the social struggle. The play was the same, the text was Molière's, but the performance revealed connotations, relationships and meanings which remained hidden in other more "aesthetic" productions. This also proves the extent to which Molière is universal, for he becomes in this way a Brazilian, an Argentine or a Uruguayan author.

In addition to the great universal classics, which provide popular theatre with many themes and ideas, all kinds of stories or sources of dramatic inspiration may be used. I remember the case of the Paraguayan director Antonio Pecci who decided to present a life of Christ; it would be hard, one might think, to imagine a subject more inoffensive and less subversive from the censor's point of view. All the same, Pecci, knowing full well that the people of Paraguay are bilingual and that Guarani is the real mother tongue of 90 per cent of the population, decided that Christ, the Apostles and the people in general would speak in Guarani, while Pilate, the centurions and other Romans would speak in Spanish. In this way the audience understood that Jesus lived in a country occupied by foreign troops and this version of the Gospel came to serve as a model of behaviour for the public.

Everything is grist to the mill of popular theatre as long as it is connected with the social situation here and now. A theatre group in Peru ▶

▶ specialized in the "revision" of television serials. One such serial, which attracted a wide following, was called *Esmeralda*; it told the story of a domestic servant who eventually married the son of the master of the house. The stage production followed the original plot more or less faithfully, and after the performance there was a debate which focused on the overt and hidden meanings of the play the public had just seen. The members of the audience discovered the anti-feminism which was built into the story: for the son of the house a wife was not really a woman he loved and with whom he wished to live but a domestic servant whose job was to look after his clothes, see to the food, and keep house.

In one Andean country, a theatre company travelled through the mountains improvising sketches from true stories told by the villagers. One of the most successful was the story of a rascally mayor, a man who existed in real life. When the sketch was performed in the mayor's home town, the audience reacted with fury, went off to the town hall and had the man arrested. A few days later, the company announced that they would be performing the same sketch in a nearby town whose mayor was equally dishonest. The latter decided to exploit the widespread belief among the peasants of the region in the existence of demons known as *pistacos*, carnivorous spirits which assume human form and eat people. He broadcast on the local radio the news that a group of *pistaços*

Photo © Augusto Boal, Paris

All the world's a stage for popular theatre in Latin America, where actors perform anywhere they are likely to attract the public. Above, Sao Paulo's *Teatro Arena*, directed by Augusto Boal, used a converted truck as a stage when taking *Revolución en América del Sur* ("Revolution in South America") to the desert regions of northeast Brazil.

Photo © Roger Pic, Paris

***Gimba*, by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, is set in the world of the Brazilian *favelas* (shanty-towns). Above, scene from the *Teatro Popular do Brasil*'s version of the play, directed by Flavio Rangel.**

Photo © Roger Pic, Paris

Adapted from a story by the popular Colombian writer Tomás Carrasquilla, *A la Diestra de Dios Padre* ("On God's Right Hand") is one of the most successful productions of the *Teatro Experimental* from Cali, directed by Enrique Buenaventura. Above, a scene from the play.

disguised as actors were in the vicinity. When the company reached the town they found the streets deserted; the terrified population had taken refuge in their homes. Even the radio station had been abandoned, although its microphone was still "live". At the drop of a hat the actors broadcast an improvised sketch denouncing the stratagem of the mayor, who suffered the same fate as his colleague when the people found out the truth.

Those who take part in this kind of theatre are not professional actors with the same training and the same economic guarantees as their fellow-artists in Europe and North America. They are people's artists; they are the people.

In the last twenty years I have travelled constantly in almost all the countries of Latin America. I have been in contact with many of these forms of theatre which are used principally as a means of promoting dialogue, of treating the theatre as a form of expression. Thus I have been in permanent contact with the many-sided reality of Latin America as I have striven to work out my own technique of "theatre of the oppressed", the main objective of which is to help any oppressed human being to achieve a form of dramatic expression through which he may attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the reality of his situation and transform it. The fundamental forms of the theatre of the oppressed are based on the same principle, that all men are capable of achieving everything within the limits of human possibility. Theatre is, or can be, an occupation, a profession, but it is above all a vocation. And this vocation is within the reach of everyone.

Every art is a language. But what is learned through one language cannot be learned through another. The most perfect and total perception of reality can only be obtained through the sum of all possible languages. Theatre is precisely this total art, the sum of all the arts: poetry, painting, sculpture, music, dance, etc. And theatre, even at its most impoverished, takes man as the centre of the universe. It is urgent and imperative that all those who are oppressed should recover this dense, rich, profound totality in order to understand the mechanisms of the oppression they endure, in order to struggle more effectively for their liberation.

"Theatre of Image" (which expresses itself through images, not words), "Forum Theatre" (in which tactics and strategies are discussed in dramatic form) and "Invisible Theatre" (in which fiction is transformed into reality, that is, the performance of a drama becomes real action in the real world) are three manifestations of "Theatre of the Oppressed" which can only achieve systematic form if they emerge from a living, changing reality. That of Latin America, for example.

■ **Augusto Boal**

EUROPE

Who's afraid of the avant-garde?

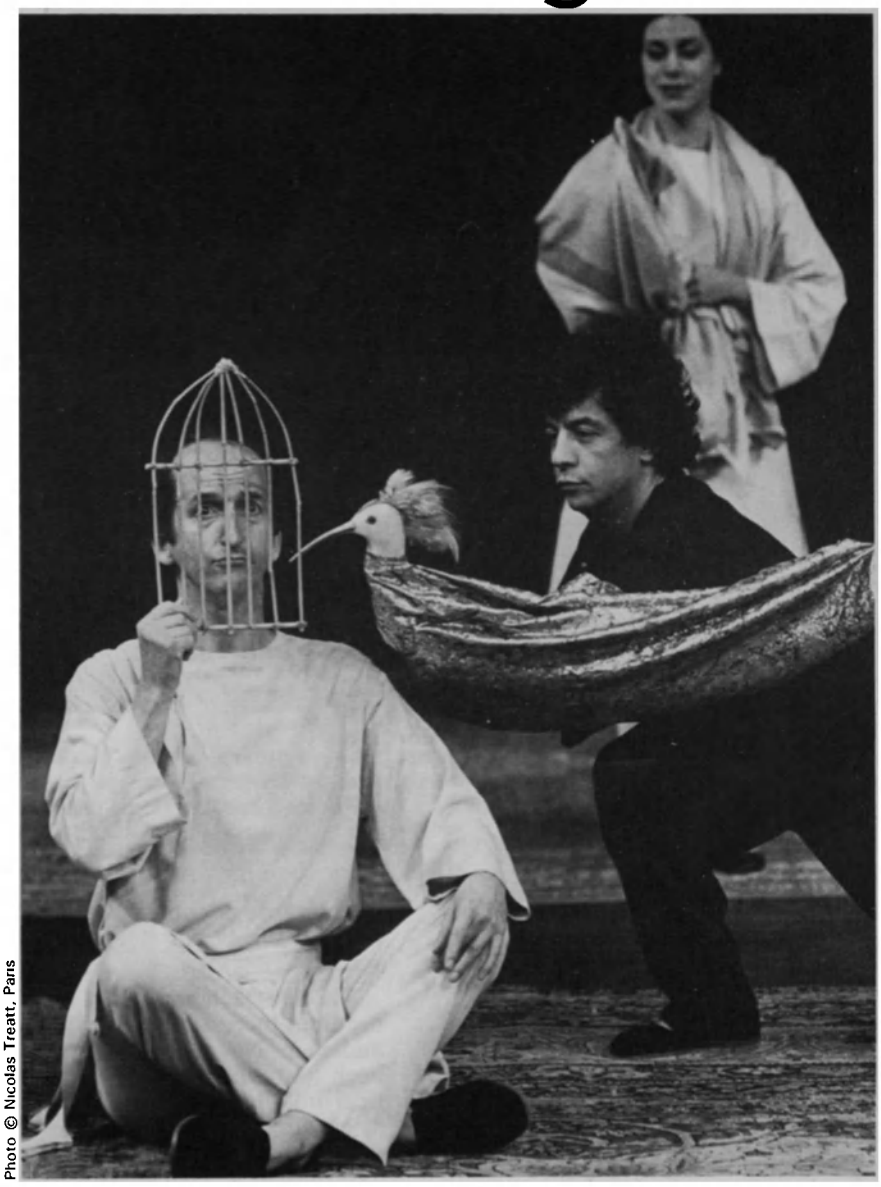

Photo © Nicolas Treatt, Paris

Scene from *The Conference of the Birds*, a production staged by the British director Peter Brook at the *Bouffes du Nord* theatre in Paris. The work is based on an allegorical poem by the Persian poet Attar (12th-13th century) which describes the quest of the birds for the mythical Simorgh whom they wish to make their king. Each actor symbolically portrays a bird.

by Ronald Hayman

BOOKS are like bananas, said Jean-Paul Sartre. They have to be consumed immediately if the flavour is to be fully appreciated. Marcel Duchamp considered that the life of a painting was limited to forty or fifty years, and Antonin Artaud said: "The masterpieces of the past are good for the past; they are not good for us."

Indubitably avant-garde theatre is indispensable if the theatre is to be kept alive, but it is self-evident that avant-garde theatre cannot go on for very long doing the same thing, and in Europe, it might be asked, what is there ▶

RONALD HAYMAN, *of the UK, is the author of a number of books about acting and theatre, including* Artaud and After *and* British Theatre since 1955. *He is a regular radio broadcaster and contributor to the London* Times Literary Supplement. *His most recent book is a biography of Kafka, and his biography of Brecht will appear later this year.*

During a rehearsal of the Polish dramatist Tadeusz Kantor's *Où sont les neiges d'antan?* in Paris, the author can be seen behind a member of the cast.

Photo © Nicolas Treatt, Paris

Fundamentally, by consenting to be members of an audience, we are contracting to remain passive—voluntarily lowering ourselves under the surface of the pool in which Narcissus will contemplate his image—and there will not be much we can do to register complaint if the exhibitionistic performers become sadistic. The six-hour production of *Hamlet* in December 1982 at the Schaubühne in Berlin looked as though it had been central to the intentions of the director, Klaus Michael Grüber, either to ignore the audience altogether or challenge it to clamber up on stage in order to see and hear what was going on. The dividing wall had been removed between two of the theatre's three auditoria, but instead of trying to fill the enormous space, Grüber used it to make the human figure look small. It was like being forced to watch the play through the wrong end of a telescope.

Luca Ronconi's production of Ibsen's *Ghosts* at the 1982 Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto—a four-hour production in the crypt of the Chiesa San Nicolo—displayed the same determination to test the patience of the audience, which was distanced as far as possible from the action and had to put up with the slow, somnambulistic movement of the actors and with provocatively histrionic mannerisms in both speaking and gesture.

One of the central paradoxes in con-

▶ left for it to do? The main landmarks in its past have been moments when the audience has been shocked, and the easiest way to shock is to break a taboo or defy a convention. In 1896, when Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* had its premiere, the opening word "Merdre" was enough, in spite of the extra *r*, to provoke fifteen minutes of pandemonium in the auditorium. In 1968, when male nudity was fully exposed in *Oh, Calcutta!*, a convention, which had survived since the Greeks, was slaughtered. But how many conventions still have life in them?

The convention that actors must be audible? This came under attack in the second decade of this century at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich when Dadaists performed on stage with their backs to the public. That a play must tell a story? In Peter Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung (Offending the Audience*, written 1965, staged 1966) the public was implicitly being challenged not to submit to the procedure which was being substituted for the usual one: four speakers were addressing the audience directly, teasingly, talking mainly about the immediate situation in the auditorium, where no illusion was being created, no narrative unfolded. How much further can the avant-garde advance? How much further up the beach can any new wave wash?

Though each wave has to recede, it becomes increasingly hard to shock an audience. Not long ago it would have been quite disturbing to see two identical middle-aged male twins, dressed as cardinals, tangoing together up and down an acting area to the tune of "Hernando's Hideaway" from *The Pajama Game*. But theatrical images like this fall into place within the natural progression of a piece like Tadeusz Kantor's *Où sont les neiges d'antan*, which was first seen in Rome during 1978 and featured in 1982 at the Autumn Festival in Paris. Today it is easier to provoke an audience than to shock it. In June of last year, at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam, the production of *Walzer* by Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Dance Company incited booing and catcalls. The audience was irked by the exorbitantly slow performance of a song, and there were apparently unrehearsed incidents, as when a dancer tauntingly shouted to the audience: "None of you are going to entertain me, are you?" A great deal can depend on the delicate art of controlling the way in which things appear to be going out of control.

temporary theatre is that the avant-garde needs the classics; the other is that avant-garde theatre is on display at the international festivals and in the big, subsidized theatres with large budgets and vast technical resources. At the end of the sixties, when Rainer Werner Fassbinder was working in Munich with his Anti-Theater, the group performed in cellars, changing rooms and a room above a skittle alley. In 1968, Jim Haynes, who had founded the small Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh five years earlier, opened the Arts Lab in Drury Lane, London. It gave hospitality to some of the earliest fringe groups, including the People Show, and it brought others into existence. Pip Simmons formed a company to put on a series of fifty-minute plays, while David Hare and Tony Bicat, who collaborated on a show compiled from Kafka's Diaries, went on to form Portable Theatre, a company to take productions into non-theatrical venues. It was not predictable but it was not unnatural that Fassbinder should move into cinema and that David Hare should graduate to directing his own plays at the National Theatre.

What is odd is that in spite of the popularity fringe theatre has achieved, there should be no eighties equivalent to Anti-Theater or to the Arts Lab. Contemporary theatrical conditions

Photo © Antonello Perissinotto, Padua, Italy

Commedia dell'arte **mask worn by a character in *La Moschetta* ("The Fly"), a work written in Paduan dialect by the Italian dramatist and actor Angelo Beolco, also known as Ruzzante (1502-1542).**

are not conducive to experimental writing, while establishment theatres quickly appropriate the most successful experimental directors from fringe theatres. One consequence is that plays with a large cast and plays which for other reasons are unsuitable for performance in a small space are no longer protected from anti-theatrical aggressions. At the Berlin Theatertreffen of 1982, fashionable directors tried to outbid each other in displays of irreverence towards the classics. Post-Brechtian alienation effects were introduced into plays by Büchner, Lessing and Kleist, while the text of Goethe's *Faust* was submitted (by Grüber) to drastic dramaturgical ▶ surgery.

Scene from a production of the Austrian playwright Peter Handke's *They Are Dying Out*, at the Théâtre des Amandiers, Nanterre (France).

Photo © Nicolas Treatt, Paris

▶ At the same time, avant-garde theatre is becoming more international. The festivals are encouraging this cross-fertilization. London, unfortunately, has lost its World Theatre Season, which exerted a healthy influence on British theatre, but discernible ripples of influence were spread over a wide area after the Rustaveli Company of Tbilisi, Georgia, was seen at the Avignon Festival, the Edinburgh Festival and at the Round House in London.

Oriental influences, too, are strongly apparent in contemporary Western theatre. Peter Brook was one of the great pioneers of intercontinental eclecticism in theatrical style. He recruited a Japanese *Noh* actor for the polyglot company he assembled in Paris at the end of the sixties, and one of the central ideas for his 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was derived from Chinese circus. In Ariane Mnouchkine's production of *Richard II* last year at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes in Paris, Japanese *Kabuki* visibly influenced the design of the stage, the declamatory acting style, the percussive accompaniment and the stylized movement with half-bent knees.

The devaluation of the word—a tendency which had long been prominent in avant-garde theatre—prepared the ground for this new wave of internationalism. Artaud believed in "the absolute dominance of the director whose creativity *eliminates words*". It is only very seldom—in such plays as Peter Handke's *My Foot, My Tutor* (1969) that words can be eliminated altogether, but Mike Leigh is one of several directors who have been using their creativity to elicit a text from actors by means of improvization, while Peter Brook has been experimenting with his international team of actors to find whether there is "another language, just as exacting for the author, as the language of words... a language of actions, a language of sounds—a language of word-as-part-of movement, of word-as-lie, word-as-parody, of word-as-rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry". When he commissioned the poet Ted Hughes to invent a new language for a production at the 1971 festival at Persepolis, he was trying to test how far human beings could be made to ignore differences of race, language and cultural tradition, communicating through movements and sounds, using the lowest common multiples of human expressiveness, and raising them to a higher power.

When he took his actors to play in African villages, he was again trying to create a form of drama immediately comprehensible to any human being, to traverse linguistic and cultural frontiers. It is in the nature of avant-garde theatre to pit itself against problems that are at most partially soluble. As one wave rolls back, the next is already advancing, and it may be that different parts of a solution are floating on each.

■ **Ronald Hayman**

Anthropological theatre

In January 1982 the Rome-based *Teatro dell'IRAA* (Institute of Research about the Actor's Art), founded by Renato Cuocolo and Raffaela Rossellini, launched with Unesco aid a project entitled "Theatre out of Theatre". The aim, in Cuocolo's words, is to explore "the possibility of a theatre of communication which could promote knowledge and understanding among different cultures and peoples". The first experimental step in this direction took the Italian actors to the Rucahue reserve in southern Chile, the home of many of the country's Mapuche Indians. There they presented their work to an audience remote from their usual European public, took part in the daily activities of the Indians, and joined in their festivals and rituals in order to study certain cultural forms such as shamanism, which is still prevalent among the Mapuche. Photo shows Italian actors and Mapuche villagers taking part in a ceremony to consecrate the spot where the performances were held. The *Machi* (shaman) is seen initiating a rite of welcome and fertility which took place near a sacred cinammon tree planted by the *cacique* (the chief of the community) in honour of the actors from a distant land.

Photo © Teatro dell'IRAA, Rome

Right, panel in an exhibition on the theme of "Masks" held at the Commonwealth Institute in London in 1980.

Photo © Commonwealth Institute, London

Shared disillusion

by Michel Cournot

THEATRE is: one or several human beings, physically present in the here-and-now, who simulate, who pretend, to do, to say something in the same place as other human beings who are also physically present and who as a rule do not move and are silent.

Those who make believe, who "play", are called "actors"; those who are silent are called spectators.

Considered coldly, from outside, theatre is not different from that which is not theatre. It is the mother who sings a lullaby or tells her child a fairy story; it is the unknown man who contrives to dress, control his gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, and chooses his words in order to attract the unknown woman.

But the purely utilitarian act, like that of the workman who performs the gestures of the assembly-line beneath the foreman's eye simply to earn his living and without being involved heart and soul in his work—that too is a form of theatre. These gestures are so profoundly alien to the workman, so much a matter of indifference and even distress, that the "acts" when he performs them.

And then there are the more common theatres of social life: judges and lawyers in the courtroom; political leaders watching the parade from the rostrum; the soldiers or civilians marching by (actors in the presence of actors); or the waiter in the restaurant who "playfully" serves with stylized gestures.

Theatre in the strict sense, the "art" of theatre, so called to distinguish it from the continuing social game, usually takes place away from the workplace, in special premises in the evening after business hours, or on Sundays and during holidays.

In these moments and places of "leisure", actors and spectators perform this parallel activity: beginning again "outside the real world", the acts, gestures and words of reality.

This counterfeiting, this imaginary imitation of real life, is not a phony operation, a shared lie. The men and women who, on stage on this particular evening, do the actor's job, really do endure the physical and spiritual effort, the sufferings, joys and anguish of authentically accomplished acts; it may even be said that they have a stronger physical perception and awareness of these acts than many clerks, labourers or intellectual workers in their working life.

As for the theatre audience, all its members have been spectators before, leaning out of the window and watching the world go by, but the act of visual and auditory perception which they perform in this particular place on this particular evening they experience with far more attention and keenness.

Time spent at the theatre might be considered as time in a thoughtful, contemplative life, a life of awareness and endurance, in the tension of truthful expression, imaginative and creative effort, while time spent away from the theatre, often fraudulent and tedious, at home, at work or travelling between the two, might be time in a mechanical, forced, uncommitted, fictitious life.

The workaday repetition of life in society might be considered as a fragile collective fiction which possibly continues to function because it rests on an age-old nucleus of habit, submission and thoughtlessness.

A spectator at the theatre, begun anew, of a great city in the morning might feel giddy at the sight of these hundreds of thousands of men and women who do not stay in bed, or at home in an armchair, but instead go down into the metro once again, take the dust-sheet off the typewriter, open the shop, sit down again, wrists chained as a safety precaution, in front of the automatic machine.

The whole performance begins anew, without conviction, above all perhaps because the new beginning is in itself a training to perform the gestures and words of this life. The performance begins anew independently of each person's real choice, the true hopes and discernment he once had, the performance begins anew and will go on until the final day in this woolly unanimous state of sleepy assent and accustomed acceptance.

And some evenings, for some who steel themselves, in those places of creation and reflection called "theatres", on the fringe of this collective sleep, gestures and words are accomplished in the light, in full awareness, with spectators who are at last awakened. A few hours of responsible life stolen from the illusion of the day.

This seems to be the meaning of Theatre in the old world. ■

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The outline of Africa serves as a backdrop for the Togolese actor and dramatist S. Kokou Allouwassio.

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AFRICA

The changing scene

by Ange-Séverin Malanda

AFRICAN theatre is a phenomenon which long sowed confusion and perplexity in the minds of those who observed it. Instead of questioning the premises which underlay their vision of African forms of theatre, such observers jumped to the conclusion that these forms merely indicated the existence of a "pre-theatre" in Africa. In other words, they were voicing a preference for the norms of European theatre at a given stage in its history.

Some aspects of the festivals and other ceremonies of traditional Africa were undoubtedly theatrical. These festivals, often held to mark specific occasions, had religious undertones and their social and economic repercussions were countless. In fact the difficulty of defining African theatre in precise terms arose from the fact that the moments of "drama" were part of such an immense canvas of experience.

Any attempt to make a brief survey of African theatre today is bound to face difficulties because of all the acts and gestures, all the salient events, which are dramatized in it. However, let us try to review some of the most significant experiments in African theatre, bearing in mind that we are confronted by a phenomenon which has, in a sense, neither centre nor periphery. It exists on a continental scale, since theatre troupes travel widely and learn from and influence each other. As a result of the generally prevailing production conditions, experiments tend to be similar in nature, and as African theatre people today map out new perspectives, they find themselves grappling with more or less the same problems.

The William Ponty training college in Senegal at the end of the 1930s is considered by many to be the seedplot of today's African theatre. But this is a restrictive, narrowly chronological judgment; the same claim could be made, for instance, of the *Collège Saint-Joseph* in the Belgian Congo during colonial times. Contemporary African theatre has been nurtured by several schools through which certain models of European theatre have made inroads in Africa.

Essentially, theatre is an event which is never repeated, since each performance is an original, ephemeral version which is different from, though akin

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to, previous performances. Traditional performances took this strictly into account and were a measure of all its possibilities. The irruption of the written text into African theatre struck a blow at this conception of drama.

As I have noted, the schools were the initial medium through which many classics of the European theatre came to Africa. The churches were the other channel through which elements of European theatre came to be somewhat rapidly engrafted onto African theatre. The most striking example of this phenomenon is undoubtedly the *kantata,* as practised in such West African countries as Togo and Ghana. These dramatizations of passages from the Bible, associated with references adapted to the African social and cultural context were at first performed in the churches and then went on to win a fresh audience outside.

African theatre is based on a dual tradition. It is increasingly tending to absorb elements originating from Western forms, while also drawing on local or regional traditions. It thus renews itself using traditional myths, stories, songs, masks and costumes, and absorbing various other influences.

"Theatre is really on the move in West Africa," says Alain Ricard. "It uses local languages, it is not always written, and often it is not written at all. Written drama, frequently in European languages, is in a paradoxical situation. Drama written in a European language is often used to train schoolchildren to use that language. As a result it loses its theatrical nature and becomes a stylistic classroom exercise."

Despite the influence of the classics of European theatre and the growing number of locally written plays, the relationship between the African theatre and written drama is an ambivalent one. The comparison made by the Togolese Senouvo Agbota Zinsou between the *concert party* and the *commedia dell'arte* is not without validity. The *commedia dell'arte* appeared in Italy after breaking away from the *commedia sostenuta* (a form connected to written drama). The *concert party,* like the *commedia dell'arte,* is based on improvisation and on the actor's corporal and verbal dexterity: there is no text to dictate what he should act. In the *concert party,* which is nevertheless derived from the *kantata,* there is no set text to govern the pace of the acting or the performance. The dramatic effect is thus not dictated by the written word. ▶

Photos © National Museum of Mali

Koteba **is a traditional form of theatre in Mali where, during the dry season, farmers and villagers turn into actors, singers and musicians.** ***Koteba*** **plays either recount events from village life or dramatize relations between villagers and the authorities. Above, a scene from** ***The Arrival of the Commandant*****. The show always begins with a "procession", top, in which the actors slowly walk on stage singing to persuade the spirits to leave the stage to human beings. Photos show actors of the National Theatre of Mali, directed by Aguibou Dembele.**

Below, Shakespeare African-style. A scene from the ***Théâtre Sénégalais*** **production of** ***Macbeth*** **at the Theatre of Nations, Paris.**

Photo © Nicolas Treatt, Paris

▶ Languages other than those used in most of the repertory of written drama (English, French) are now taking the stage. Another kind of dramatic rhetoric is being shaped from new raw material. Bernt Lindfors' comment that "forms of oral expression have a greater impact than the written word in Kenya" can be applied to Africa as a whole.

The relationship between the African theatre and the written text is one of knot-like ambiguity. It expresses all the issues involved in the transformation of a heritage and lies at the heart of the work done in recent years by such groups as the *Roccado-Zoulou* Theatre directed by Sony Labou Tansi in the Congo, by Koteba theatre as directed by Souleymane Koly in the Ivory Coast, by the Mwondo Theatre of Zaire, and the many Yoruba theatre groups of Nigeria. The bold experimental work done at the Kamirithu cultural centre in Limuru (Kenya) in 1977 with their production in Kikuyu of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* is part of the same phenomenon.

The work produced in the early years of modern African theatre was characterized by frantic and sterile imitation of European theatre. Paradoxically, new perspectives were then emerging in the West through the discovery of non-European drama. Paul Claudel was studying Japanese theatre, Antonin Artaud Balinese theatre, and Bertold Brecht Chinese theatre.

In 1935, Artaud noted in *Le Théâtre et son Double* that "the revelation of Balinese theatre" had been for him an opportunity "to give a physical and non-verbal dimension to the theatre, in which drama is contained within everything that can happen on stage, independently of a written text, instead of theatre as we know it in the West, bound to and limited by the text." This comment also explains, incidentally, why people dared to insinuate for so long that African theatre did not exist—failing to acknowledge that the emergence of the "Gutenberg galaxy" was related to the importance attached to the written text in the dominant conception of European theatre. A glimpse of Souleymane Koly at work is enough to see how far away he stands from this approach. As he has explained, he puts on plays in which there is "little textual matter, a lot of corporal expression, dancing, music and singing." The play sometimes becomes musical comedy.

African theatre today can be distinguished from traditional theatre in a number of ways. What the French historian Marcel Detienne has called a veritable "process of laicization" has boosted the transformation of traditional theatre. Theatre in the past was marked by the imprint of sacred rituals. The birth of contemporary drama took place at a time when the sacred aspects of certain traditional forms of dramatic expression were becoming less prominent.

New social and historical determinants, including those caused by the intensive urbanization process which has been taking place in Africa in the last few decades, have shaped theatrical activities, which are now centred primarily in the cities, their impact being felt only sporadically in the rural areas. In the mid-1970s, Catharsis, a group from Lubumbashi, scoured the country observing and collating traces and vestiges of traditional theatre practices. In 1976, members of the Mwondo Theatre created a show based on the mythology associated with twins. They transformed, mimed and sang these myths, drawing on a variety of ethnic traditions.

Above all, urbanization has changed the material conditions in which shows are produced and reach their audience. Very few theatres are open on a permanent basis. Shows are often staged on improvised stages (in bars, schools, on trestles, etc.). The fact that theatres exist, regardless of their numbers, requires dramatists to devise a new kind of practice. Even the itinerant troupes of Nigeria, which seem to be becoming professionalized (their tours follow regular circuits) are facing increasingly acute production problems. Whereas the triumph of the director in Europe dates from the nineteenth century, in Africa his reign has yet to begin. Outside the "institutional" stage (such as that of the Daniel Sorano Theatre in Senegal) suitable solutions to production and stagecraft problems are hard to find. Here the African theatre is handicapped by its material poverty.

As far as audience reaction is concerned, the forms of drama which command the most faithful public are those which are produced in local languages, by such troupes as those which perform Kotéba in Mali and Nigeria's Yoruba theatre. These are the forms which encourage audience participation—open-air theatre being particularly successful in this respect.

Urbanization has thus not stifled the emergence of new forms of drama in Africa. Through these new forms, a new aesthetics is today being created. African theatre is a theatre of experimentation.

■ **Ange-Séverin Malanda**

Photo © Maboulou, Brazzaville, People's Republic of the Congo

The *Troupe du Roccado-Zoulou* of Brazzaville (People's Republic of the Congo), directed by Sony Labou Tansi, has won a reputation in recent years for taking themes from everyday life and presenting them in a style in which the country's cultural identity is expressed through speech and gesture. Photo shows a scene from *Ils sont là !* ("They are there!"), a stage adaptation of seven stories published under the title *Tribaliques*.

JAPAN

Noh and Kabuki: The beauty of form

by Masao Yamaguchi

First performed in 1713, Tsuuchi Jihei's *Sukeroku Yukarino Edozakura* (Sukeroku, Flower of Edo) is one of *Kabuki's* most scintillating plays. With its extravagant procession scenes, sword fights and passages of pure slapstick, it portrays all the sensuality, vitality and humour of *Kabuki* plays of the Genroku period (1688-1730). Below, a famous scene in which a comic servant, Sembei (right) confronts Sukeroku, the hero of the play.

Photo © Japanese embassy, Paris

OF the various forms of classical Japanese theatre, *Noh* and *Kabuki* are the best known outside Japan. Chronologically speaking, *Noh* theatre, which originated in the second half of the fourteenth century, preceded *Kabuki*, which dates from the early seventeenth century.

Noh theatre was the invention of the actor Kan-ami Kiyotsugu (1333-1384) who, under the patronage of the all powerful shogun Yoshimitsu Asikaga, combined several earlier theatrical forms to create a new genre known as *sarugaku-no-Noh*. Kan-ami's new creation was refined by his son Zeami who not only raised *Noh* to the height of artistic perfection but also left behind him a corpus of philosophical writings on the principles of its performance.

Noh had immense appeal for the warrior class of medieval Japan, partly because its aesthetic rigidity seemed to have something in common with *samurai* rigorism. However, unlike the rigour of the warrior ethic, the aesthetic rigidity in *Noh* was achieved through the creation of formal beauty by means of body movements that had the power to reach the subconscious level of the mind of the audience.

Essentially, *Noh* is based on the shamanistic layer of Japanese culture. Economy in the décor is characteristic of the staging of *Noh*. We see only a picture of a huge pine tree on the backdrop, a picture which reminds the connoisseur of the *kaju*, or plank in the shape of a tree, that is to be seen centre stage in the *wayang kulit* (shadow theatre) of Java and Bali. In Japanese folk tradition big old trees were venerated since they were thought to be, like the *kaju* of the *wayang kulit*, the mediating point through which the gods descended to earth. The pine tree may, in fact, have been thought to be the axis running through the centre of the earth and its association with the notion of eternity supports the explanation that it is the pivot of the world. It is therefore the focal point of transformation where the gods, the actors in whom they become incarnate, and the audience undergo some kind of change. ▶

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▶ The *Noh* repertoire includes several types of play: *okina* and *sambaso*, celebratory plays in which a god assumes human form as an old man and holds a dialogue with a local spirit wearing a black face-mask; *waki Noh*, in which local gods of lesser status are represented; "warrior-ghost" plays; "woman" plays; plays about insanity; and "demon" plays.

Although outwardly different, these *Noh* plays are all expressions of a similar basic structure. They follow a narrative pattern in which unworldly figures, whether demons, the subconscious spirit of women, or the souls of the dead, are evoked on the stage through the agency of the "bystander", act out their story in dance form and finally disappear after having been appeased by the prayers of the priest.

There are usually three major roles in *Noh* plays: the *shite* (hero), the *waki* (the "bystander", normally in the character of an itinerant priest) and the *ai-kyogen* (an intermediary representing a local personage).

The role of the *shite* is divided into two parts: the *mae-shite*, in the early part of the play, and the *ato-shite*, when the character appears in another form. Thus the *shite* appears first as an ordinary person who withdraws after meeting the *waki*; the *ai-kyogen* then explains the local legend relating to the hero, or *shite*, who reappears after an interval in his second form wearing a mask.

In addition, a chorus, seated at the right hand side of the stage, recites narrative parts of the script and, at moments of climax, comes on to the stage with highly symbolic expressions. The chorus is said to represent the inner voice of the audience.

The role of the *waki* is of interest because it is in part a reflection of a historical reality. In late thirteenth century Japan there was a Buddhist sect known as *jishu* which specialized in communication with dead souls by means of chanting and dance. Members of the sect are said to have visited ancient battlefields and prayed for the warriors who had died there. The *jishu* priest would recount the story of a fallen warrior to the people who gathered round him, evoking the spirit of the dead hero through the power of his performance. These priests were thus, in a sense, the successors in medieval Japan of the shamans of ancient times who acted as intermediaries between this world and the world beyond.

Noh theatre is essentially a theatre of fantasy. The stage can be visualized as being the equivalent of a cinema screen, the unworldly figures projected on it being an extension of the *waki's* subconscious mind which acts, as it were, as the film projector. In watching the "screen" of this theatre of fantasy, each member of the audience sees deep into the recesses of his own mind.

It is through these ancient roots in the Japanese shamanistic experience that *Noh* theatre still has power to move the audiences of today. Watching *Noh* is thus like a psycho-therapeutic process which cures the audience of the frustrations caused by its alienation from the roots of human existence.

Kabuki is a later theatrical form than *Noh*, being developed early in the seventeenth century; but the relationship between the two forms should not be seen only in chronological terms. In the history of Japanese theatre, and inherent in its very nature, we see a tendency for new theatrical forms to be created in terms of dialectical frameworks.

From early times, the appearance of gods in Japan was marked by the presence of two in part opposing figures: the *kami* (god) and the *modoki* (interlocutor, intermediary). This dichotomy is repeated over and over again in the structure of *kami* belief and also in the creation of new theatrical forms in Japan.

Although this opposition between *kami* and *modoki* originally signified an opposition between god—the visitor from outside the community—and *modoki*—the local interpreter of the god's message—it could also explain various types of dialectical relationship, for example: *kami—modoki*; sacred—profane; master—servant-clown; conqueror—defeated; *shite—waki*; aristocratic—popular; senior—junior.

It was against this dialectical background that *Kabuki* came into existence. The art of *Kabuki* is said to have been originated by a legendary figure, Okuni, reputedly a priestess attached to a shrine called Izumo-taisha. Appearing on stage as a *waki* who evoked the spirit of Yamasaburo Nagoya, a young and handsome warrior said to have fallen in battle, Okuni succeeded in attracting large audiences. It should be noted that the essential structures of *Noh* as a shamanistic theatrical form was maintained in Okuni's *Kabuki*.

However, *Kabuki* had a different orientation and different patrons from *Noh*. Whereas *Noh* had been patronized by the *Samurai* class and was oriented towards the past, *Kabuki* drew its patrons from the new merchant class and was oriented towards the contemporary world of affairs rather than the legendary and historical past. While evocation of the spirit of the past in order to reach deep down into the unexplored recesses of the mind was one of the more important purposes of *Noh*, *Kabuki* was concerned with glorifying the vital energy of the urban commercial class. Although *Kabuki* often employed historical settings, these were used to disguise the contemporary nature of events since the Tokugawa government forbade *Kabuki* per-

One category of *Noh* plays is known as "women pieces" or *Kazura Noh* (literally "wig pieces", since wigs are often used for women's roles). The performers' masks and elaborate heavy silk costumes contrast with the traditional austere stage setting of *Noh* plays which consists of a representation of an aged pine tree. In this scene from *Hagoromo* (The Robe of Feathers), by the great *Noh* playwright Zeami (1363-1443), a goddess captivates a humble fisherman by the beauty of her dance.

Photo © Mireille Vautier, Paris

Photos © Toshiro Morita, National Theatre of Japan

An actor preparing for an *aragoto* (violent or warrior style) *Kabuki* play, applies a special form of stylized make-up, called *kumadori*, which makes use of bold designs of bright red, blue, grey or black on the background of the whitened face. The red lines represent the veins of the hero standing out in anger at the evil deeds of the villain.

formers to draw on material from contemporary political affairs.

The art of *Kabuki* was developed in two cities, Osaka and Edo (today Tokyo), with two different styles emerging from the two cities: *wagoto* and *aragoto*. The citizens of Osaka, being principally engaged in commercial activities, developed a gentler, more realistic attitude which was reflected in *wagoto* (soft or merchant style) *Kabuki*, whereas at Edo, the centre of military government, the mix of warrior and citizen gave rise to a specific life style and short-tempered behaviour which was echoed in the highly stylized, more violent *aragoto* (violent or warrior style) *Kabuki*. Here again we find a dialectical contrast similar to that between harmonious and violent gods—harmony being the attribute of the parental deity and violence that of his offspring.

Scene from a *Kabuki* dance-play, *Kagami Jishi* (The Dancing Lion). *Kagami Jishi* is a *Kabuki* version of an older *Noh* play. Persuaded to dance by her companions, a lady of the court dons a lion mask which gradually takes possession of her and begins to dance of its own volition.

Photo © Toshiro Morita, National Theatre of Japan

The association of violence with the emergence of a young deity, as reflected in *aragoto*, had long been an element of the Japanese folk imagination, while *wagoto* seems to have inherited the structure of the visiting god who is met by a local priest or priestess. In a *wagoto* performance the scene is usually set in the geisha quarter to which rich merchants come to conduct stylized love affairs following strict rules of etiquette. The client is assumed to be the visiting god, while the geisha is cast in the role of the priestess. Thus there is a continuation of the structures based on the *shite,* or main character, and the *waki*, or interlocutor.

Wagoto and *aragoto* developed in different urban settings and are classified as different and contrasting styles. Nevertheless, both forms are sometimes found in the same play, as in *Sugawaradenju-tenaraikagami* ("The House of Sugawara"), and sometimes the hero of a *wagoto* is transformed into the bloody hero of an *aragoto*, as in *Natumatsuri-naniwakagami* (a bloody incident in the festival of Osaka).

Being a free and popular form of art, *Kabuki* was able to integrate many of the arts of the street performer and achieve a synthesis of various forms of music, dance and performing style which were excluded from the closed, sophisticated *Noh* art form. It was particularly suited to the assimilation of material from marginal categories, such as thieves and geishas, and turning it into a refined aesthetic performance. It is this ability to synthesize the central and the marginal, the sublime and the mundane, that enables *Kabuki* to continue to attract large audiences in Japan. Whereas *Noh* bases itself on the deep structures of human experience, *Kabuki* takes as its starting point the trifling incidents of daily life. Both forms, however, end up by achieving a similar effect of formal beauty. In this way each encompasses the other.

■ **Masao Yamaguchi**

HAITI

The awakening of Creole consciousness

by Félix Morisseau-Leroy

THE Creole language theatre scored its greatest success with Sophocles' *Antigone* in a version which was not only linguistically transposed but also adapted to take into account the traditions of the Haitian people, their gods and the ways of their leaders. The première on 23 July 1953, at the Rex theatre, Port-au-Prince and the performance in May 1959 at the Theatre of Nations festival in Paris, had a worldwide impact.

But in the opinion of the author nothing confirmed this success more than an exclamation by one of the five thousand spectators, mainly peasants, who were attending a performance of the tragedy on the lawns of the Agricultural College at Damiens. Just when Creon, in desperation, was calling on Tiresias to invoke Danbala in his favour, the spectator exclaimed: "Danbala won't reply!" Evidently the spectator who voiced this ill-timed comment had foreseen the dénouement of the tragedy; he had already clearly understood that the gods of African Guinea, who had taken the place of the Greek gods in the Haitian adaptation, had abandoned Antigone's murderer.

Antigone continued its run at Port-au-Prince, Saint Marc and Cap Haitien. It was performed in New York, Boston, Montreal and Miami where the Haitian community, comprising all age groups, rediscovered their home country or discovered aspects of it which were completely new to them.

FELIX MORISSEAU-LEROY *is a Haitian poet, novelist and dramatist who writes both in French and in Creole. After studying in the United States, he worked in the theatre in Ghana and Senegal. He is the author of a number of dramatic works including* Natif-natal *(poems),* Kasamansa *and* Jadin Créol *(stories), and a trilogy about Creon, the figure from Sophoclean tragedy.*

Below, a production of *Antigone* by the *Théâtre de Haïti*. Sophocles' tragedy was not simply translated into Creole but adapted to traditional Haitian ways and beliefs of African origin. An English version of this "Afro-Haitian Antigone" has been staged by the Arts Theatre of Ghana. Right, a scene in which Tiresias, the Theban seer, invokes the African divinity Danbala.

Photo © Roger Pic, Paris

An English version of the Haitian *Antigone,* translated by Mary Dorkonou, was performed in Ghana. A young chief who had attended three consecutive performances rushed backstage at the end of the show to enquire when he could see it for the fourth time. The same version, slightly adapted for a Jamaican audience, was performed at the National Theatre Festival of Jamaica.

After the initial success of *Antigone* in Creole at the Rex theatre, Franck Fouché put on his *Oedipus Rex* there for the same popular audience. Later, drawing on Haitian traditions, he wrote a large number of plays in Creole, which he staged for middle-class audiences at the Rex theatre and at the *Théâtre de Verdure Massillon Coicou.* After his death his *Bouki au Paradis* was performed at Port-au-Prince before an enthusiastic audience.

It is difficult for me to talk about Creole language theatre without using the first person. The more I write in Creole, the more I feel part of a Creole-speaking community. Personal experience is no more than the experience of each of my characters within the context of each new play.

I do not consider it immodest to talk about it any more. Bernard Shaw said that Joan of Arc wrote *Saint Joan.* I can claim with even more justification that, once they are placed in a dramatic situation, my characters write my plays in Creole, just as the people whose impassioned scribe I am dictate the poems and stories I publish.

In 1953, I said to Pradel Pompilius—who after thirty years of hesitation has become a fervent enthusiast of Creole—that if I were to cast Creon in the role of a rural police chief obliged to kill his niece and daughter-in-law-to-be in order to affirm and consolidate his authority, he would be quite capable of expressing his dilemma of conscience in Creole, "unless", I stated, "one must speak French to have a dilemma of conscience, or even to have a conscience at all."

The men of letters of my generation who, thirty years ago, did not think that there could be a viable Creole literature now support it fervently. For me the case is won and I call on young writers to stop wasting time on futile polemics about the last of Toussaint Louverture's sons and to devote themselves to creative writing. The real problem is whether one wants to emulate Placide, Toussaint's son, who joined the French army and fought against his father, or Isaac, his son-inlaw, who fought at his side.

Of course there were other issues that bothered me, some of which have now been resolved and others whose solution has been put off till better days. Where, for example, could actors for the Creole language theatre be recruited? The answer in this case was obvious—among Creole-speakers or among those who, while speaking one or more foreign languages had maintained a Creole awareness.

Antigone was created in 1953 for the literate audiences of the Rex theatre. *Anatol,* written in 1955 and staged at my theatre at Mont Hercule with a cast recruited from the habitués of the *ounfo,* a temple of the Haitian popular religion in the Plaine des Frères, enabled me to put into practice many of my new options.

Séfi, a fearless *manbo* (a high-ranking member of the voodoo hierarchy in Guinea) realizes that the power which the gods on the side of good had granted to Bout, her husband, until recently a famous *oungan* (high priest), is weakening because he uses it to do evil. She therefore hands over the *ason* (a rattle with a bell attached, the symbol of spiritual power) to her son. The ceremony of this transmission of authority is so moving that all the people present enter into a trance. All the dramatic art of the Griots and the Anansi story-tellers of Ghana and the Ivory Coast combined with the traditions of the *commedia dell'arte* to bring about a miracle—at the end of the performance the president of the *Alliance Française* himself led the applause.

At the *Institut Français* the audience interrupted the performance, rising to acclaim Anatol for five minutes at the moment when he raised his sword in salute to the *laplas,* the voodoo master of ceremonies.

At the open-air theatre, although it started to rain in the middle of the second act, the audience, far from dispersing, called the actors back after the end of the third act and began to sing with them. ▶

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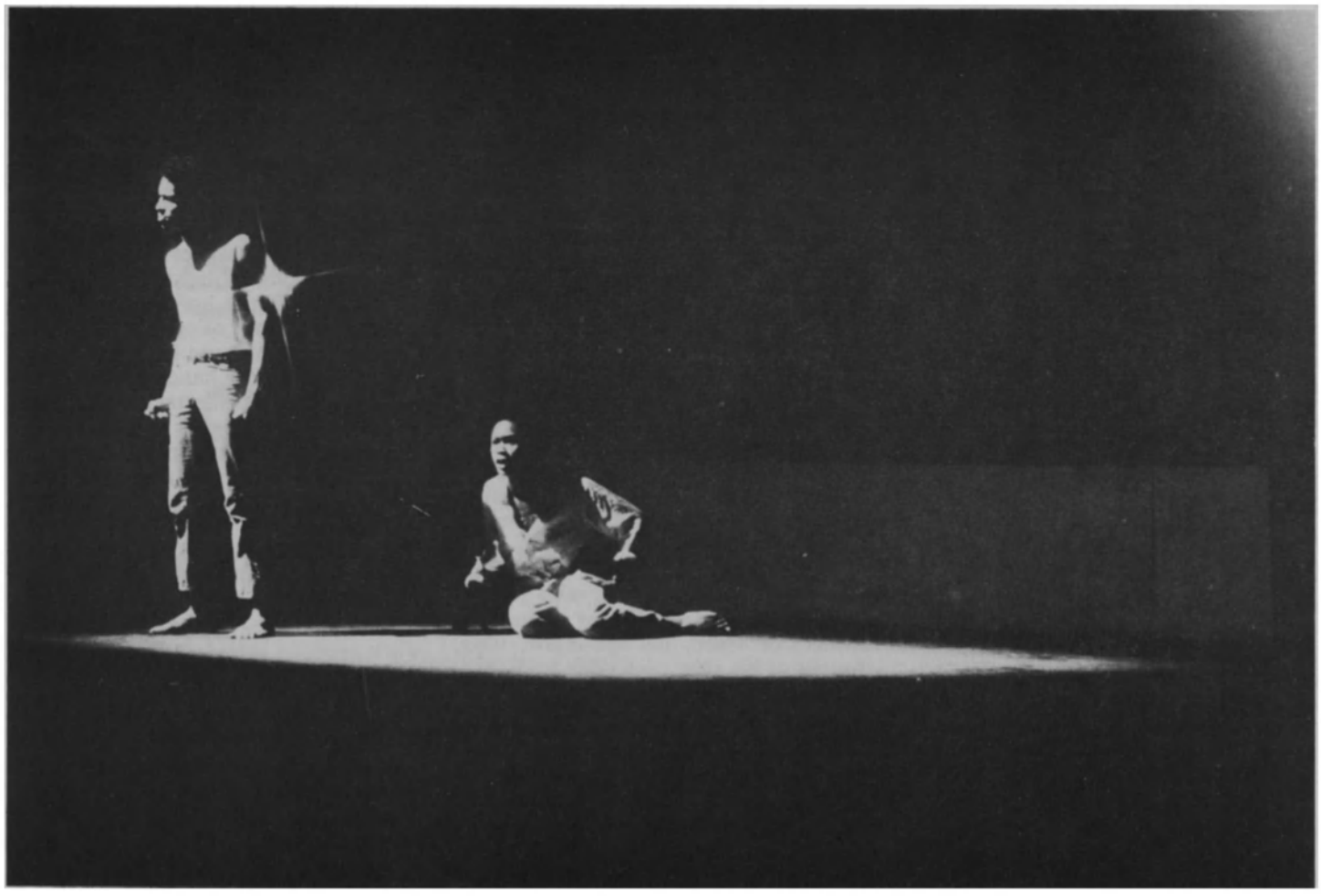
Photo © Roger Pic, Paris

La Tragédie du Roi Christophe **by the Martinique poet Aimé Césaire, in a production by the *Compagnie du Toucan* at the Theatre of Nations, in Paris. Henri Christophe, a freed slave, became President of Haiti in 1806. Proclaimed king in 1811, he committed suicide in 1820 after an insurrection. His kingdom became part of the Haitian Republic.**



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***Monsieur Toussaint,* as performed by the *Théâtre Noir de Paris*. In this Antillean work, "a prophetic vision of the past", Toussaint Louverture, a captive in the fort de Joux in the French Jura, evokes the slave insurrection on Saint Domingue which he led from 1796 until 1802 when he was arrested and imprisoned by the French.**

▶ In Ghana, *Anatol* was renamed *Kweku,* a title more in keeping with the traditions of the Fanti chiefs. During the 1960s the Dramatic Workers Brigade troupe of Ghana, benefiting from conditions conducive to the development of popular theatre, performed it more than a hundred times throughout the country.

In Dakar, *Anatol* was given the Wolof title of *Doodoo,* but it was less of a success since the favourable conditions mentioned above did not exist.

I have already spoken of Franck Fouché, whose memory we cherish. It must be stressed, however, that the new generation of writers has hoisted high the flag of the Creole language. In the United States, the Koukouy Society organizes Creole language cultural evenings during which poems are recited and dramatic songs are sung. Among the most talented members of the Koukouy Society Jean Mapou, the author of *Pwezigram,* and the poetess Deita, the author of *Majordiol,* can be singled out.

In 1953 it was unthinkable that Creole would be used for all literary genres, although the "literary men" of the time reluctantly conceded that, because it was closer to oral expression than the written word, it was conceivable for the theatre to be in Creole.

But then a star of the first magnitude appeared in the firmament of the Haitian novel. Astronomers adjusted and re-adjusted their telescopes to focus on... Frankétienne. A binary star? Two surnames or two first names? At all events a personage who quickly became famous. One cannot think of his *Dézafi* without a dozen passages worthy of any anthology springing to mind. It would take up too much space to quote them here. I shall merely say that the novel revolves round a zombi who, having tasted the savour of love, comes down again to reality.

But Frankétienne did not stop there. He turned to the theatre and provided us, in rapid succession, with two plays, *Twou Foban* and *Pelen Tet,* which were performed at Port-au-Prince to packed houses. The second of these Creole plays has achieved great success among emigrant Haitian communities, which are firmly opposed to any "zombification" of the masses.

I do not want to write a conclusion. I am opening the discussion. For, clearly, I have not told the whole story. I will, however, say that the lyrical theatre in the Creole language, just like the successful Creole records and songs of Maurice Sixto, Koralen, Martha Jean-Claude, Faran Juste, Kiki Wainwright and others, has attracted the attention of the critics. No, I have not told the whole story so I cannot write a conclusion. My African experience has, however, shown me that there are new horizons for the popular theatre in national languages. The *Anansi,* the theatre of Ghana, the *Gwee,* the circular stage of Senegal and the arena of Casamance, to mention only a few of the more striking aspects of traditional African theatre, have given me an entirely new concept of theatrical architecture.

In March 1982, in the "note to the critics" for my *Vilibone,* I predicted that, within twenty years, when speaking of the revolution in Haitian literature, they would be referring to the emergence of literature in the Creole language. Haitian literature has already gone beyond this irreversible stage of cultural liberation. Even though the government has shelved the national educational reform aimed at making Creole official at all levels of primary education, the few, increasingly rare opponents of Creole seem almost as backward as those who maintain that the earth is flat.

Today, more and more authors are writing in the Creole language and none of them seems to be about to lay down his pen. On the contrary, a militant Creole language movement which extends beyond the confines of the archipelago is gradually taking shape, ready to defend itself against the wiles of cultural imperialism.

■ **Félix Morisseau-Leroy**

EGYPT

The shadow and the substance

by Magda Wassef

MAGDA WASSEF *is an Egyptian specialist on film and theatre. She is the author of several studies on cinema and a doctoral dissertation on "The image of the peasant woman in Egyptian cinema". For Unesco she has written a study on "The cultural heritage in Arab cinema".*

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Dakket Zar **(literally, "Music for a dance of exorcism") by Mohamed El Fil, in a production directed by Mohsen Helmy in Cairo, in 1980. The play takes a critical look at certain ancestral Arab rites.**

THE origins of Egyptian theatre have been the subject of much debate: has it been influenced more by shadow theatre and Karaghöz or by Western drama? Today this debate is closed. For more than half a century theatre has been fully integrated into Egyptian social and cultural life, and Egyptian playwrights, directors and actors today, like their counterparts elsewhere, have other preoccupations. They are concerned with problems of modern theatre and forms of production, the relationship between the latter and traditional and popular theatre, the question of freedom of expression in relation to the State, urban theatre and rural theatre, and so on.

Here I should like to give a brief account of the first of these problems, that of modern theatre, taking into account the link which exists between experimentation with forms inspired by Western theatre and those derived from the Egyptian and Arabic cultural heritage.

Egyptian theatre has been characterized by two conflicting trends since the 1960s, a period during which theatre has experienced a remarkable flowering. The first trend is inspired by Western formal experimentation and trends such as the theatre of the absurd of Ionesco and Beckett, while the second draws its inspiration from Egyptian and Arabic stories and popular drama.

The "Pocket Theatre" created by Saad Ardash in 1962 and the "Avant-Garde Theatre" founded a few years later both encourage experimental work, but the more traditional National Theatre and the "El Hakim Theatre" also support bold productions.

These theatres have staged Tewfik el Hakim's *Ya Tale'e El Shagar* (You who climb the tree), a first attempt at Egyptian "theatre of the absurd", and *El Farafir* (The Fledglings) by Yusef Idris, in which the author brings together Western theatre and traditional forms by taking his two main characters from the Egyptian shadow theatre. In *El Ardehalgui* (The Public Writer) and *El Wafed* (The Outsider), Mikhail Romain evokes the absurdity of life through characters who shun reality and sink into a kind of paranoia. Alfred Farag was one of the first Egyptian playwrights to draw inspiration from the Arab cultural heritage. His well-known trilogy *the Barber of Baghdad, Ali guénah el Tabrizi* and *The Letters of the Judge of Seville* have had a strong influence on the new Egyptian theatre. Farag is an innovator in the sense that he adapts old tales to modern times; he handles language and dialogue with great skill.

These playwrights produced their main body of work during the 1960s, and left their mark on that decade. There are also a number of talented young directors who have contributed to Egyptian theatre the knowledge and experience they acquired in Europe.

The development of Egyptian experimental theatre is largely due to such directors as Saad Ardash, Karam Metawe, Galal el Sharkawi and Ahmed Zaki. Their different approaches to their work have brought great diversity and richness to Egyptian theatre.

While social theatre was the dominant trend in Egypt in the 1960s and formal experimentation was relatively limited, the 1970s saw the birth of a more aesthetically advanced theatre. Certain forms, such as "poetic theatre" and "epic theatre" enjoyed a heyday. Salah Abdel Sabour, whose *The Tragedy of El Hallaje* had enriched "poetic theatre" as early as 1963, produced *Leila and the Madman* and *After the Death of the King*. Drawing inspiration from the Arab cultural heritage, Chawki Khamis brought a new dimension to epic theatre. Already perceptible in *The City of Masked Men* and *Love and War*, this epic dimension reached its apogee in *Sindbad* directed by Ahmed Zaki, a play in which the chorus and not the individual hero plays the leading role.

Fawzi Fahmi's *The Virgin of Rachid* is also a work of epic theatre, but here the language used by the author is of paramount importance; it is akin to the language of poetry, although it does not respect all the rules of poetry, and is close to the literary language, though lacking its rigidity.

The experiments carried out in modern Egyptian theatre thus reflect the current preoccupations of their authors. Today a period of pure experimentation seems to be over and to have given way to a less esoteric, more popular form of theatre. ■

SOVIET UNION

The theatre of the market-place

by Nelly Kornienko

THE theatre is as many-sided as life itself. As the centuries go by, its forms undergo modification, extinction, renaissance and transformation, and its faces, imagery and masks may change. But all these forms—those which have had their day as well as those which have been transformed or reborn—still continue to sustain the culture of peoples.

...Colourfully painted with scenes from fairy-tales, the curtain rises to show the market square of an old Russian town. On to the stage bursts a noisy crowd of jesters, clowns and buffoons. A dancing bear shuffles at the end of its chain. Someone has climbed up on a pair of stilts. Carriage wheels turn, horses neigh and whinny. There is a jingling of bells, a great strumming of balalaikas and *gusli**, the shrill sound of pipes. This is how Soviet director Les Tanyuk's production of Alexander Pushkin's *Tale of the Fisherman and the Fishwife* begins. First staged at the Central Children's Theatre in Moscow in 1966, it has been performed since then on something like 700 occasions before audiences in Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, the United States, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, and other countries.

In accordance with the conventions of the entertainment staged by strolling players at the old *yarmarki*, or fairs, the actors become wild animals, trees, the sun, the moon, the wind, with the popular comic figure *Shut Gorokhovy* leading the dance. "Look! Look! The sea!" cries a little girl in the audience. And lo and behold, embroidered cloths which the actors have stretched from one side of the stage to the other are suddenly transformed into waves which sweep over the heads of the heroes of the tale. Flashing and splashing, dancing on their crests, *Zolotaya Rybka*, the Golden Fish of Good Fortune, converses with *Starik*, the old fisherman. Originally written as a short story, Pushkin's fable about human pretensions and the cost of unbridled ambition, carries a timeless message. In the traditional fairground entertainment played to a noisy, appreciative audience, with the spectators mocking the behaviour of the characters portrayed, the director has found a satisfactory means of adapting Pushkin's story for the stage.

... On the stage of the Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad, an old grey horse bemoans his unhappy fate. Once he was famous and handsome, a great winner of rosettes. Today he is forsaken and condemned. Very soon, he will be led off to the knacker's yard. Never, perhaps, has this pathetic story of a horse—and not just any horse, for we are listening to Tolstoy's *Kholstomer*—been told as movingly as in this performance by Yevgeny Lebedev, under the direction of Georgi Tovstonogov.

Brought to the stage, exposed to the eyes and ears of an attentive public, related "from the inside", an individual existence is revealed in all its vulnerability and fragility. Perhaps for the first time, the aesthetics of popular theatre here venture into the hidden, inner dimension of the human condition. Human, because, in the last analysis, Kholstomer's "internal monologue" concerns each and every one of us. It is a reflection of "the life of the human spirit".

But for the existence of the *berikaob*, a Georgian carnival masquerade whose origins reach back to the pagan fertility rites of an agricultural society of the second millennium BC, Robert Sturu's production in Tbilisi of Bertold Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* would not have been both authentically Georgian and authentically Brechtian, so international in spirit that it was comprehensible without translation to audiences from Mexico and Greece, England and Yugoslavia.

In this production, the deliberate rationality and restraint of Brecht's original treatment is unexpectedly replaced by a colourful, carnival atmosphere in which the audience itself participates. Brecht's "reasonable" heroes break into snatches of Georgian song, and punctuate their talk with the spirited gestures of the country's mountain people. They have, indeed, become kinsmen of the traditional characters of Georgian folklore—the Warrior, the Fiancé, the Match-maker, the Bride... The device could hardly fail—after all, Brecht himself set the action of his *Chalk Circle* in the Caucasus—and it is only surprising that nobody had the same idea before Sturu.

On the other hand, Sturu's choice was perhaps a natural one. His production was staged in 1976, after a decade which had seen a revival of interest in the roots of national cultures, in the sources of different peoples' ways of thinking. In the theatre, this inquiry found expression in a renewed interest in, for example, the puppet theatre of the Ukraine; the mummers and wandering musicians of Moldavia; the strolling players of Tajikstan, improvising their performances with the aid of masks; and the *oyun*—the popular farcical plays of Azerbaijan.

In the Soviet Union, the renaissance of the people's theatre, the "theatre of the market place", may be observed today in a great variety of dramatic contexts—from opera to vaudeville, from ballet on ice to the experimental theatre of the universities, from festivals of sport and the Olympic Games to overtly political theatre.

The Taganka Theatre in Moscow, directed by Yury Lyubimov, consistently builds its productions around the search for a synthesis between the popular, festive, carnival tradition (from which Lyubimov borrows the spirit of improvisation but not the colourful atmosphere: his own approach is particularly austere), and psychological, committed, morally didactic drama. It is not by accident that the foyer of the Taganka Theatre is decorated with four symbolic portraits—of Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold and Brecht.

Brecht's *The Good Woman of Szechwan*, Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Listen!*, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and other productions by the Taganka Theatre embody just such a synthesis, which is also reflected in the dramatic evocation of the peasant rebellion of the eighteenth century, led by Emel'yan Pugachev. Here, the setting is the square where the main events of the historical occasion took place, but the performance

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NELLY NIKOLAEVNA KORNIENKO *is a Soviet specialist in stage aesthetics and the sociology of culture. Among the 40 works she has published in the USSR and elsewhere is a translation into Ukrainian of* On the Art of the Theatre, *by the famous English director and innovator Edward Gordon Craig. She has worked in the Sociology of Culture Sector of the All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Art, and is currently on the staff of the Russian language edition of the* Unesco Courier.

* *Gusli*, a popular Russian stringed instrument.

Colour page right

Pali, the monkey general allied to Rama, fights with Thotsakan in this scene from Thai *Khon* ("mask drama") theatre. Works in the *Khon* repertory dramatize the pursuit of Thotsakan, the ten-headed demon king of Longka, by Rama whose consort, Sida, he has abducted. The actors mime a text which is recited and sung by a narrator and a chorus. Scholars believe that the steps and dance movements of *Khon* derived from those of Chinese shadow theatre.

Photo © School of Oriental and African Studies, London

Centre colour pages

Left hand page

Above, Beijing Opera uses a codified dramatic "language" in which gestures, movements, vocal intonations, musical instruments and rhythms all have precise meanings which are understood by the audience. Here, in "Return to Jingzhow", a scene from the opera "The Happy Association of the Dragon and the Phoenix", princess Sun Shangxiang tearfully takes leave of her mother the Dowager Queen, played by a man.

Photo Fred Mayer © Magnum, Paris

Below, *Macunaima*, a play adapted by the *Grupo Arte Pau Brasil* (director Antunes Filho) from a novel by Mario de Andrade. Songs, myths, legends and dance are all used with telling effect in this Brazilian epic directed in a style which is less realistic than visionary and fantastic (see photo). The young hero is a picaresque figure, a compound of sensuality and demoniacal cruelty. In a phantasmagorical universe his quest takes him from the virgin forest to the big city and ultimately to the sky—where he is transformed into the Great Bear.

Photo © Maison des Cultures du Monde, Paris

Right hand page

Above, *Sol solet* ("Sun, Little Sun"), staged by Barcelona's *Els Comediants* troupe, which specializes in street theatre. The show features juggling, balancing acts, horse training, dancing giants, and midgets. *Sol solet* has toured in a number of countries and has been performed at the Reykjavik Festival (Iceland).

Photo © Pau Barcelo, Barcelona

Below, agrarian dance of the Bobo people of Upper Volta. The dancers, who wear leafy masks which entirely cover their bodies, are incarnations of Dwo, a divinity who represents fertility and growth and acts as intermediary between the creator (Wuro) and men, who jeopardize the original balance between sun, earth and rain. Once a year, they run through the village, catching in their leaves the "dust" of evil and thus "washing away" all the misdeeds committed in the previous year by the community, which is regenerated by taking part in the vegetation-renewal rites.

Photo Michel Huet © Hoa Qui, Paris

Opposite page

Above, a version of Shakespeare's *Richard II* performed in Paris in 1981 by the *Théâtre du Soleil* directed by Ariane Mnouchkine. The staging, costume, and the general rhythm of dialogue and movements were directly inspired by Japanese *Kabuki*. Ariane Mnouchkine has said that "theatre as a mirror is not enough... unless the mirror says 'look at the other person, someone you do not know at all, someone from the antipodes of time, space, or mind; look at him, for he concerns you'." This emphasis on human similarities rather than differences may explain why Shakespeare's play about a medieval English king, produced in accordance with the tenets of an Oriental conception of drama, should have aroused widespread interest among the French public.

Photo Martine Franck © Magnum, Paris

Below, a scene from a *Kathakali* dance-drama of southern India, acted by members of the Keralakalamandalam company. Some fifty of the original hundred-odd *Kathakali* plays, based on the great Hindu epic poems, (the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*) still remain popular on the stage. About sixty varieties of elaborate make-up and costumes exist, divided into nine main types. The colours and designs enable the audience to recognize immediately the nature of the character being portrayed.

Photo © Roger Pic, Paris

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includes extracts from the works of the great modern Russian poet Sergei Yesenin, which the actors declaim in the manner of town criers or old masters of the art of rhetoric.

The "popular theatre" of a country is a theatre which bears a specifically national imprint, which is distinctive and which exists in its own right. But it is not merely an art form; it is also a deeply ethical manifestation, the soil in which a people's wisdom is rooted, the repository of the axioms, standards of behaviour, rituals, ceremonies and concepts about the world which it has accumulated over the centuries. For this reason, the popular theatre is, as a general rule, a matter of particular interest to creators and innovators, in other words to those whom history has designated as the founders of a fundamentally new art. In the Soviet theatre, this was the role of such Russian directors as Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko, Vakhtangov and Meyerhold, the Ukrainian Les Kurbas, the Georgian Mardjanishvili, the Armenian Kalantar, and many others.

This year marks the centenary of the birth of one of these great men of the theatre, Yevgeny Bogrationovich Vakhtangov. The event is being celebrated by the international community, in accordance with its inscription on the Unesco calendar of anniversaries. Vakhtangov was one of the most brilliant, original and famous artists of his age. Joining the Moscow Art Theatre in 1911, he quickly proved to be one of the most talented disciples of Stanislavsky and an ardent advocate of his system. For Vakhtangov, the central precept of Stanislavsky's teaching was that man's inherent creativity must be awakened. If it failed to convey an image, if it lacked inventiveness, if it did not speak in the language of poetry, if it merely copied life, the theatre had no claim to be called an art. On the other hand, the popular imagination was capable of working wonders, because it was nourished by, but never simply imitated "real" life.

Vakhtangov believed that the making of an artist depended on the possession of the three faculties of inspiration, imagination and inventiveness. "I love the theatre in all its manifestations", he wrote in 1917, "but what attracts me most of all are those moments when the human spirit is at its liveliest."

Even earlier, in 1912, he had spoken of his dream of establishing a workshop where, in a genuinely creative atmosphere, a close-knit community of apprentice actors could prepare themselves for their great calling.

After the October Revolution, which he called "a phenomenon of cosmic dimensions", Vakhtangov addressed himself specifically to the subject of the popular theatre, which he considered to be an ideal medium for the expression of man's innate creativity. "If the artist is chosen to bear the ▶

Photo Y Belinsky © Fotokhronika, Tass, Moscow

Over the past twelve years, the "Subbota" (Saturday) Young Theatre Club, a Leningrad-based amateur group, has been putting on avant-garde shows inspired by incidents of everyday life. There is virtually no separation between stage and auditorium and everyone present is invited to take part in the performance and the discussion that follows. Above, the group photographed in a Leningrad street.

Photo M. Chehnov © Museum of the Yevgeny Vakhtangov State Academic Theatre, Moscow

One of the rare photographs of the Russian theatrical director Yevgeny Vakhtangov (1883-1922), the centenary of whose birth is being celebrated by Unesco and the international community. A pupil of Konstantin Stanislavsky, the founder of the "method" school of acting, he is noted for his innovative productions of Chekhov's *The Wedding* and Carlo Gozzi's *Turandot*.

▶ spark of Immortality", he said, "then let him direct his inner eye towards the people, because what is in the people is immortal. Today, the people are creating new ways of living. If they are doing so through Revolution, it is because they had no other means of proclaiming their sense of Injustice to the world."

Vakhtangov's project for a truly "popular" theatre, as accessible and universal as the open-air, market-place theatre of old, took shape in his mind in 1919; but it was not destined to be carried to fruition during his lifetime. Vakhtangov died three years later, and failed to see the first public performance of his last great production—the embodiment of his central thesis, that unfettered creativity, the celebration of delight, abandonment to festivity in all its forms are manifestations of the highest spiritual leanings of mankind.

Princess Turandot, based on an eighteenth-century Italian play by Carlo Gozzi, had its première on 28 February 1922, and has become a classic of Soviet and world theatre, the subject of thousands of pages of criticism and analysis. At the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow it has been performed over 2,000 times, by four generations of actors and before as many generations of spectators.

Vakhtangov's unbridled imagination lifted the spectator into the realm of "fantastic realism" where everything was possible. There was an orchestra, but the musicians' instruments were combs and paper. The beards of the male heroes were made of scarves, or tufts of coarse fibre. In place of turbans, the female slaves in the play wore rolled-up pairs of trousers. Sweet-box covers served as portraits, paper-knives took the place of steel daggers and, with suitable dignity, a tennis-racket was brandished as a regal sceptre. And God knows how many other surprises awaited the audience on this gaudy stage!

What was being celebrated was the rapturous free flight of the spirit—a genuine *commedia dell'arte,* an art form which had leapt across time and space to transform this Moscow theatre into a place of popular festivity and carnival, where everyone could join the crowd of merrymakers, exchanging his identity for that of one of the "eternal" jesters, Brighella or Truffaldino, Pantaloon or Tartaglia.

Photo © Bakhrushin State Museum of Theatrical Art, Moscow

The leading characters in Bertold Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle,* in a scene from the adaptation by Robert Sturu. Brecht's characters are portrayed as traditional characters of Georgian folklore.

Vakhtangov's *Turandot* was a revolutionary event which brought new ideas and new means of expression to the theatre. His aesthetic method, in which the actor both underwent his own authentic emotional experience, in Stanislavskian style, and also expressed his relationship with the character he played, became one of the key principles of the Brechtian approach. His synthesis of the popular, democratic values rooted in the *commedia dell'arte,* as reflected in *Turandot*, with the new principle of the "dual" life of the stage character lent itself to unlimited variations. The foundations had been laid for a tradition based on a universal approach to the future of the theatre. Vakhtangov was a man who thought in terms of the future. After him the scope of theatre had to be redefined. The ideas of popular theatre which he cherished still live on today.

■ **Nelly N. Kornienko**

On the stage of the Bolshoi Drama Theatre, Leningrad, actor Yevgeny Lebedev in the role of the old grey horse in the play based on Tolstoy's short story *Kholstomer,* a satire on human beings as seen from the point of view of a horse.

Photo © Bakhrushin State Museum of Theatrical Art, Moscow

YUGOSLAVIA

The Belgrade International Theatre Festival

by Jovan Cirilov

THE Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF) was founded at a time when great changes were occurring in the European theatre. Its establishment was the outcome of a meeting of actors held in Belgrade at Workshop 212, the theatre which, during the 1950s, staged the first performances of the works of Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, etc., to be given in a socialist country. Its slogan, "New Trends in the Theatre", proclaimed the general line the Festival was to follow.

This was a period when a new form of theatre was reaching its height, when informal groups were coming into being, the stages of baroque and traditional theatre halls were being abandoned in favour of the street, garages or disused sheds, a time of political commitment which called for a theatre in its own image, a protest theatre, an anti-literary theatre which saw itself as a theatre of action rather than of words.

It was a time when the avant-garde theories which had emerged during the inter-war period, such as Antonin Artaud's "theatre of cruelty", and Expressionism were being revived and new trends were emerging such as the "guerilla theatre", the "theatre of action", "poor theatre", the "theatre of panic", the "theatre of the absurd".

The first Festival, in September 1967, brought together troupes which had embarked on innovative courses, such as the "Living Theater" of New York, with Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the "Teatr Laboratorium" of Wroclaw, with Jerzy Grotowski, the "Divadlo za Branou", with Otomar Krejca.

From the first, however, it was decided that the BITEF should not be devoted exclusively to an avant-garde repertoire. Krejca, for example, staged Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, although he gave this classic a new perspective which took account of the most advanced research.

For sixteen years the Festival has been guided by this twofold approach. Through many presentations of the masterpieces of the world repertoire it has sought to provide a new interpretation of the classics, be it Shakespeare re-interpreted by Peter Brook, Peter Zadek or Yury Lyubimov, Strindberg by Ingmar Bergman, Molière by Anatoli Efros or Roger Planchon, to name but a few. At the same time, in keeping with the main purpose of the Festival, the most diverse trends of the avant-garde theatre have been represented through the work of directors from all over the world, including Victor Garcia, Robert Wilson, Luca Ronconi, Shuji Terayama, Tadeusz Kantor, Ariane Mnouchkine, Ljubisa Ristic, and many others.

The BITEF also pays homage to the guiding influence of age-old traditional theatre forms on twentieth-century drama. In addition to modern works, the Festival hosts almost every year a performance which takes the public back, as it were, to the very roots of drama thus giving them greater insight into aspects of present-day theatre. There have been performances of *Kathakali*, *Noh* and *Kyogen*, of the Beijing Opera and African ritual theatre, of Sicilian puppets and the naive theatre of Naples.

Over the past sixteen years, virtually every performance has been followed, the day after its première, by discussions between the artists and the audience. Thus members of the public have been able to put questions to the greatest directors, authors and actors and let them know their own point of view.

Ever since the tenth festival, which was also that of the Theatre of Nations, there has been a parallel festival called "BITEF on film". Shows which for one reason or another could not be performed live during the Festival are presented on film or video-cassette. The public has thus been able to see, among others, *Peer Gynt* by Peter Stein, *Shakespeare's Memory* by Giorgio Strehler, Ariane Mnouchkine's film *Molière,* and *Mother Courage* by Bertold Brecht.

BITEF shows are often performed in other major cities in Yugoslavia such as Zagreb, Ljubljana, Skopje, and Sarajevo, as well as in smaller cities, and the Belgrade television network broadcasts the most important shows live or recorded.

At the close of the Festival a Yugoslav jury awards prizes (sculptures by the Belgrade artist Nebjsa Mitric) and diplomas of merit for those shows which best express the new trends. Audience surveys are conducted throughout the Festival and a further prize is awarded on the basis of the views of the public.

During its sixteen years of activity, the BITEF has also dealt with a variety of themes such as "the origins of the theatre", "theatricalism", "directors of the new reality school", "new stages", "the classics in a new light", and so on, which have led to deeper research into contemporary problems in aesthetics and have given rise to discussion in specialized reviews throughout the world.

Finally, the concept of "Third Theatre" was born in Belgrade in 1976 during the tenth BITEF, when, at a special meeting on the theatre in the Third World, it was proclaimed by Eugenio Barba who has since brilliantly affirmed its practical, concrete existence throughout the world. (See *Unesco Courier* January 1978.) ■

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The Performance Group of New York in a scene from *Dionysos 69*, directed by Richard Scheckner and performed at the Belgrade Festival.

Photo © BITEF, Belgrade

Ardjuna, a hero of the *Mahabharata*, one of the great epic poems of Hinduism, as he appears in the *Kathakali* dance-drama. The *Kathakali* theatre, which originated in Kerala, south-west India, in the 17th century, is part of the Indian theatrical tradition in which poetry, music and dance are interlinked. The characters are easily identified by their stylized costumes, make-up, and gestures.

INDIA

The gift of the gods

by Suresh Awasthi

KATHAKALI, the world-famous classical dance theatre of Kerala in southern India, is the product of a theatrical tradition in which drama is the gift of gods, an art in whose creation all the deities of the great Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva—are involved. Drama was divine in origin, and when it descended from heaven to earth and was practised by men it became an offering to the gods. The outstanding Sanskrit poet and dramatist Kalidasa (4th century AD?) rightly described theatrical performance as *Chakshu-Yajna*—"visual sacrifice".

In Hindu religious thought God is engaged in an eternal play. Play is the modality in which He displays His presence in the world, assuming human form to restore order and righteousness at critical junctures in human affairs. His worldly deeds in His incarnation are called *lila*—sports, illusion. Just as God becomes incarnate and acts as a player *(lilikara)* in this world, men impersonate and play gods. Kathakali theatre reflects this vision of life in which the divine and the human are constantly mixed.

Kathakali is also representative of a tradition in which theatre is an arena of confrontation between gods and demons, the forces of good and evil. Through the kaleidoscope of some fifty plays in the current Kathakali repertoire, we get glimpses of stirring scenes of challenge and encounter, and of fierce fighting, killing and dying. Kathakali theatre is a ritual glorification of the eternal theme of conflict between *sat* and *asat*, good and evil.

In its aesthetics and performing techniques, Kathakali belongs to a theatrical tradition which emphasizes the values of stylization, imagination and poetry. To give the fullest autonomy to the actor and his art, the

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dramatic text is recited by two reciters. Thus liberated from the tyranny of the word, the Kathakali actor has cultivated and developed other aspects of acting, namely bodily movements accompanied by symbolic hand-gestures, make-up and costume, and the expression of psychic states. This is consonant with the Indian dramatic tradition whereby acting is conceived as having four aspects: *vachika* (verbal), *angika* (bodily movements), *aharya* (costume and make-up), and *sattvika* (psychic states).

Kathakali has evolved a unique system of training to prepare the actor to deal with this relationship between the performer and the text. Elaborate eye-exercises and the learning of symbolic hand-gestures known as *mudras* are the two special features of the training system. Movements of the eyeballs, eyelids and eyebrows enliven facial expressions and accentuate hand-gestures. With twenty-four basic hand-gestures used in various permutations, a whole sign language has been evolved to interpret the dramatic text.

Gesture does not duplicate the function of the word; it enables the actor to heighten its emotional impact. The choreographic structure of Kathakali closely follows the recited text; it is interdependent with and fully integrated into the verbal structure.

Kathakali is a unique example of a fully evolved and integrated form of drama which has taken elements from a variety of sources such as earlier classical forms like *Kuttiyattam* (the oldest classical form of drama for the presentation of Sanskrit plays) and *Krishnattam,* ritual performances, and *Kalari,* the martial art of the region. It also borrowed from certain simpler forms of recitation and story-telling. Recitation remains the basis even in its fully evolved form, and performance is in essence a dramatization of the recited text. Most of the time there are only two or three characters present in the performance area, telling and listening to a story, reflecting and recapitulating.

The history of written Kathakali plays goes back only to the early seventeenth century. These plays deal with the two great Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* and the *Bhagavata Purana,* the sacred book of the Krishna legend. Indian theatrical tradition prefers the use of familiar thematic material, and Indian theatre derives its mystical power from the sharing of myth between the performers and the spectators. Performances dealing with the Rama and Krishna legends are not merely a theatricalization of the myth, they are also a restoration of the myth. It was natural that these performances should have originated in the temple, the place of the meeting and marriage of heaven and earth.

The thematic material of known and shared myth also determined the aesthetics, performing techniques and conventions of Kathakali. It facilitated the development of the art of the actor, and of a scheme of stylization covering every aspect of the performance. The elaborate system of make-up with symbolic colours and intricate designs specifying character-types, gorgeous costumes and huge headgear, as well as the codified body movements and symbolic hand-gestures, are all part of the scheme of stylization. The scheme thus provides for multi-channel communication; each channel has its own autonomy, but the aesthetic scheme provides for links.

A traditional Kathakali performance in a temple courtyard is a spectacle to delight the gods. A three-foot-high brass lamp at front stage centre dimly lights the small performance area, which is at ground level. The audience sits in darkness, and the whole atmosphere is filled with a sense of mystery and awe. The lamp serves as the focal point, the actor treating its wick as the god of fire through which the offerings of his hand-gestures are made to the audience.

A half-curtain held by two stage hands is the only prop and the only piece of scenery. Skilful manipulation of the half-curtain intensifies the spectators' expectancy as they strain to catch a glimpse of the actor, giving his entrance the force of revelation and making his exit mysterious. Similarly, in certain temples the vision of the deity is given to the worshippers only after a ritual removal of a curtain. In Kathakali, the half-curtain also solves the problem of time and space in a non-realistic, metaphysical way. The curtain stands for a lapse of time, any length of time. It connects different time sequences—divine and human time, mythical and historical time—and different spaces, linking even divine and human spaces. Thus, in a sense, time and space are made to vanish.

Forms such as Kathakali, which deal with legendary material and use ancient, codified performing techniques, are the product of cultures which mix the mythical and the historical, the religious and the secular, the traditional and the modern.

It was because of their inherent power that Kathakali and other traditional forms of Indian drama readily responded to efforts for their rehabilitation and rejuvenation in the 1930s when the first wave of cultural renaissance enlivened the traditional theatre arts which were languishing under foreign rule. The second wave, which began after independence in 1947, has not only fully restored their artistic power and glory, but encouraged some extremely exciting experimental work by bringing about a lively interaction with the contemporary theatre.

The noted playwright K.N. Pannikar, of Kerala, with the semi-trained Kathakali actors of his group Sopanam, has staged a most successful production of the world classic *Shakuntala* by Kalidasa, as well as some other Sanskrit plays revealing the theatrical power of the classics for the first time. Creatively using the elements of *Yakshagana,* the traditional theatre of his region, Karnataka, B.V. Karanth in 1980 put on a fascinating production of *Macbeth* which made Shakespeare relevant for contemporary Indian audiences. Ratan Thiyam, of Manipur, using elements from the traditional ritual theatre of his region, has evolved in his own plays dealing with social problems a style which has unusual power.

The work of these and some other young directors is the result of their search for roots and part of a larger phenomenon of cultural decolonization. Traditional theatre, with its staggering variety and vitality, is playing a meaningful role in this crucial moment in the history of modern Indian theatre. ■

Photo © Roger Pic, Paris

Left, scene from a performance by a *Kathakali* troupe at the Theatre of Nations festival in Paris. Lighting is provided by a lamp placed at the front of the stage. The only prop is a curtain which is used to symbolize the passage of time and to dramatize the actor's entrances and exits.

Photo Lennart Olson © Bern, Paris

SPAIN

Curtain up on Catalonia

by Xavier Fabregas

BECAUSE of its geographical situation, Catalonia has been a land of passage for widely differing peoples. As a result its culture is an amalgam wrought over many centuries from the most diverse ingredients into new and original forms. This must be kept in mind in any consideration of the Catalan theatre and any study of its present forms.

It is not by chance that the first man of the theatre in Catalonia whose name has come down to us is Emilius Severianus, a second-century mimographer, or author of directions for pantomimes, who, judging by the stone monument erected in his honour by his fellow citizens in the Roman theatre at Tarragona, achieved great popularity. The name of Emilius Severianus stands for the predominance of gestural expression and dramatic action over the written word, characteristics that have been preserved in the Catalan theatre of today. Two of the most representative present-day theatrical companies, Els Joglars and Els Comediants, lay stress on mime, on the movements of the actor, on the continuing validity of inherited forms of culture in the technified, automated world of today. This does not mean, however, that oral communication or contemporary customs are ignored.

The medieval theatre of Catalonia, which coincided with the period of expansion of an independent State, now constitutes a literary heritage that can stand comparison with that of any other European culture of today. However, some authors of the Renaissance, Baroque and neo-classical periods, whose works are now being re-published and revived, followed foreign trends without succeeding in giving them a new personal formulation. It is not until the nineteenth-century Romantic movement that we come across some playwrights whose works conquered a wider public and who still occupy a place which, in other theatrical cultures, is reserved to older classics. Among these, Angel Guimerà (whose works have been translated into more than twenty languages), Frederic Soler, Ignasi Iglesias, Santiago Rusiñol and Josep M. de Sagarra are names which are known today throughout the Catalan-speaking world (more than eight million people) and their plays continue to be acted.

A taste for acting and the theatre seems to be part of the Catalan way of life. In every locality, however small, there is a group with its own hall which rehearses and produces plays more or less regularly. According to a survey conducted some years ago, there are about 3,000 theatrical groups in Catalonia.

The professional theatre is developing rapidly in Barcelona and Valencia, the two most important cities where Catalan is spoken. The Theatre Institute is located in Barcelona and provides courses in acting, production and scenography for more than 1,500 students.

Catalan writers for the theatre represent a wide range of trends. From 1939 to 1945, because of the cultural repression conducted against the Catalan people by the dictatorship, plays in Catalan were completely prohibited, and from 1946 to 1975, owing to the censorship, plays had to be staged either in elliptical form or underground. This favoured a theatre of more or less veiled political satire, which led to some brilliant successes such as *El retaule del flautista* by Jordi Teixidor.

The most representative figure of that period is the poet Salvador Espriu, who wrote for the theatre an *Antigone* which is a symbolical reconstruction of the Civil War, and *The First Story of Esther* in which he superimposes two worlds, that of the Old Testament and that of his own *Myth of Sinera,* which are a transcription of contemporary Catalan society compared to the Jewish people and in danger of extinction. In *The First Story of Esther*, Salvador Espriu sought to write the elegy of his people in an apocalyptic moment of enforced silence.

The theatrical work of another Catalan poet, Joan Brossa, although also politically committed, follows very different lines. An heir of Surrealism and friend of Joan Miró, with whom he collaborated on several occasions, Brossa has written over four hundred "theatrical proposals" which can be classifed in several groups: works in which he tries out new forms modelled on established theatrical forms, such as the *sainete* (sketch) or naturalistic drama; theatrical "happenings" which either avoid the Italian style of décor or use it as a sort of Pandora's Box; a long series of stripteases with dramatic content; works involving impersonation or conjuring; ballets and musicals, some of which have been produced with music by Josep

Catalonia, with an autonomous nationality and its own distinctive language and culture within the Spanish context, offers a remarkable example of theatre in a national minority language. Right, scene from Joan Ollé's production of *Plany en la Mort d'Enric Ribera* ("Lament for the Death of Enric Ribera") by the Valencian playwright Rodolf Sirera.

Photo © Pau Barceló, Barcelona

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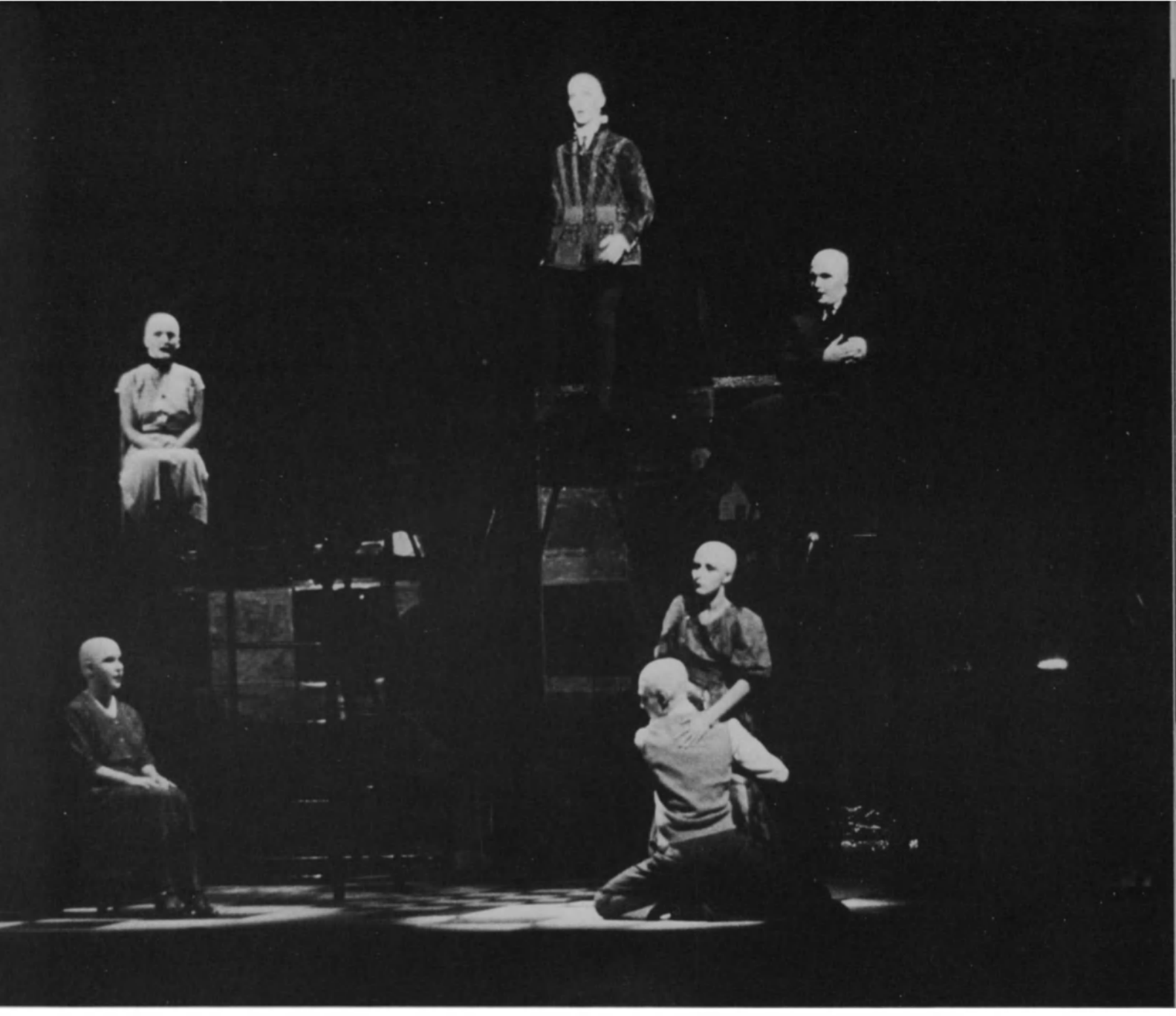

M. Mestres Quadreny and décor by Antoni Tapies.

Salvador Espriu and Joan Brossa belong to a generation which, although very young, took part in the Civil War of 1936-1939 and suffered the consequences of the defeat and repression which followed it. They were followed by a large number of younger writers born after 1939, of whom I shall mention only two, who are now in full maturity—Josep M. Benet y Jornet, and Rodolf Sirera.

The works of Benet y Jornet offer an account and an assessment of childhood based on the author's youthful surroundings and personal experiences; he very quickly moved away from the initial strict realism of *Una vella coneguda olor* (An Old Familiar Smell) to create a dream world which reflects the rebellion provoked by the adult world *(The Disappearance of Wendy)*. Benet y Jornet has also achieved renown as the author of imaginative texts for children. His works have been translated into Spanish, Portuguese (in Brazil), English (in the USA), etc.

Rodolf Sirera learned his craft in the fringe theatre of the Valencia region. Since 1970, he has been director and promoter of the El Rogle theatre group. He began by writing plays for this group such as *La pau retorna a Atenas* (Peace returns to Athens), a very free adaptation of Aristophanes. His works, some of which were written in collaboration with his brother Josep Lluis, soon became investigations of contemporary Valencia society. The search for new theatrical forms represents a very important aspect of the theatre of Rodolf Sirera. For instance, *The Murder of Doctor Moraleda* was written as a puzzle which the spectator is called upon to piece together to reconstruct the story.

Although Catalan is a Romance language, closely related to its neighbours, and occupies a geographical area which can be regarded as privileged from the point of view of the cultural history of the West, its literature encounters many difficulties when it comes to its dissemination beyond its own linguistic area. This is not due to a weak demographic base. Statistically speaking, Catalan is well placed amongst the spoken and written languages of Europe. The causes must be sought in the absence of institutions with responsibility for the diffusion of literary works abroad. Only this can explain why Catalan painters like Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí and Antonio Tapies are very well known everywhere while, on the contrary, poets, novelists and playwrights of similar importance are not.

At all events, the most important theatrical companies are determined to break into the international circuit and have succeeded in doing so on many occasions with works whose contents could be understood despite language barriers. Els Joglars and Els Comediants are two such companies whose activities are not limited by frontiers.

The history of Els Joglars is closely linked to that of its director, Albert Boadella. Boadella and Els Joglars initially presented themselves to the ▶

▶public as a traditional mime group with whitened faces and black body-stockings. However, they began gradually to use speech, abandoned the brief sketch in favour of the single-theme production and adopted masks, make-up and varied costumes. According to Boadella, the theatre should play a provocative role, reconstructing topical issues in aesthetic terms. For instance, in *M-7 Catalonya* he has posed the dilemma of national cultures at a time when the world is moving towards uniformity and mechanization; in *Laertius,* the features of a post-nuclear biology which is gradually developing to move again towards self-destruction; in *Olympic Man Movement,* the deceitful illusions of Neo-Nazism.

Boadella writes and directs his own plays, some of which, like *La Torna,* in which he presents the case of an ordinary prisoner who is condemned to death by the military authorities so that they can justify the shooting of a political prisoner, have caused him real problems. Following the staging of *La Torna,* Boadella was imprisoned. Having feigned illness and been transferred to hospital, he escaped by walking along the ledge outside the fifth floor, in the centre of Barcelona, while jeering at the police. It was a fantastic feat, worthy of one of his own plays.

Els Comediants have sought their inspiration in popular festivities, and their plays are sometimes acted on the streets with giants and large-headed dwarfs, like the fight of Saint George and the Dragon, sometimes in traditional theatres in the form of dances or *verbenas,* but the productions are always very carefully planned. The amount of improvisation which may be included in each production of Els Comediants is strictly calculated according to the overall rhythm of the piece.

Some actors have followed a path of their own. One of them is the mime Albert Vidal, who has succeeded in achieving a synthesis of European gestural forms with those of the Far East, especially Japan, and has created works like *El bufó* (The Buffoon) in which the search for new forms does not exclude contact with a popular public.

■ **Xavier Fabregas**

The Catalan theatrical group *Els Joglars* (The Jugglers) in a scene from *M.7 Catalonya*. Originally a mime group, *Els Joglars* are directed by their founder Albert Boadella. The title of the play, which is a reflection on Catalonia and its culture, is derived from Catalonia's listing (No.7) in Wallace Muller's inventory of twenty-three Mediterranean cultures.

Scene from *The First Story of Esther*, by the great Catalan poet Salvador Espriu, performed by the Adria Gual School of Dramatic Art, Barcelona. When he wrote *Esther*, nearly forty years ago, Espriu was writing, in symbolic language, an elegy for the Catalan people reduced to enforced silence.

Photos © Pau Barceló, Barcelona

Photo © Tran Van Khe, Paris

The 'paddy-field' puppets of Vietnam

THE villagers have gathered on the banks of the village pond. The air is filled with the sound of gongs, drums, and folk instruments. On one side of the pond a brick construction (it might equally well be of planks or bamboo) has been erected. A bamboo screen reaches from the roof to the surface of the water. The rhythm of the drum-beats rises to a frenzy. Pushing aside the curtain, a wooden puppet the size of a small child appears on the water. It is Teu, the compère of the show. He begins to speak...

Thus begins a water puppet show in a village on the Red River delta in northern Vietnam. This very ancient art, in a region of rice-fields where water is everywhere, is now being rediscovered. Its themes are inspired by village events, popular myths and legends, and the familiar figures of life in the delta, such as the angler shown in the photo above.

How does it all work? "The puppeteers are concealed behind the bamboo curtain", explains the Vietnamese specialist Tran Van Khe. "Their hands and feet are in the water. Only their silhouettes are visible". Some puppets are simply placed at the end of long bamboo poles. Others are manipulated by an ingenious mechanism of stakes and strings beneath the muddy water. The puppets may be highly complex; in some cases they are articulated and can perform several movements simultaneously. Thanks to the ingenious manipulation system surprise effects can be obtained which draw cries of applause from the audience: banners suddenly emerge from the water, completely dry, and flap in the wind; soldiers in red or blue uniforms parade and turn right or left according to their colour; a girl astride a fish crosses the pond to offer betel leaves to the audience.

Unesco's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture is helping the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to restore this extraordinary and unique art to its former glory. Other activities connected with the theatre which are also receiving support from the Fund include: the creation of the *Centro de Investigación y Creación Teatral del Ateneo* in Caracas; the *Centre Mandapa* in Paris, which is concerned with the study and promotion of the Asian dramatic arts; the *Aty-Ne'e* theatre group in Paraguay (for the creation of an itinerant theatre workshop); a film on the "Elche Mystery" in Spain; and a book on the *Chikwakwa* popular theatre in Zambia. ■

FINLAND

Women in the limelight

by Irmeli Niemi

UNTIL quite recently, the appearance of a woman on the stage was considered a strange and even suspect phenomenon. Shakespeare's great female roles were created to be played by men. When women were finally able to play them, the enthusiasm arising from this innovation led to excesses: scripts were loaded with purple passages, casts were swollen with supplementary female characters and plays were on occasions padded with new episodes and even given dénouements other than those conceived by their authors.

Primitive theatrical tradition, based on folklore, was also linked primarily to the world of men, with allusions to hunting and war, and was acted out by men. There was one exception—the famous Finno-Ugrian wailers. For a long time, they prefigured the future actors of Finnish drama. The wailer communicated powerful feelings of sadness and despair to the rest of the gathering and, although her frenetic lamentation was based on a model handed down from generation to generation, it was partly improvised and was therefore a personal interpretation. In playing her lyrical role, a professional wailer could arouse in the gathering a wave of collective emotion when faced with the dead and death or during the ritual of marriage.

It was during the seventeenth century that women started to appear on stage in Europe. Many actresses followed the example of the famous German actress Caroline Neuberg. At that time, a woman who wanted to be an actress had to leave her family, start by playing breech roles, and then marry a partner or the director of the troupe.

In Scandinavia, the influence of foreign theatre first made itself felt through itinerant troupes. These troupes had to fight against hunger and poverty for the theatre was not highly regarded, especially in religious circles which set the fashion by considering the theatre as a source of depravation. In order to survive in this unfavourable social climate they had to display a great deal of cohesiveness. They were frequently family concerns in which the father, the mother and the children worked together.

The rise of the nationalist movement in nineteenth-century Finland sparked a passionate desire to create a Finnish national theatre. Students started putting on short plays for a limited public. Aleksis Kivi (1834-1872) began writing the first plays in Finnish of real artistic value. He was, however, opposed to having female roles played by male students and this caused serious problems. Finally, a famous Swedish-born actress, Charlotte Raa, who had not really mastered the Finnish language but who was inspired by a desire to foster Finnish culture, undertook the first major role in Finnish. The performance, given in 1870, gave the necessary fillip to the Finnish theatre which soon acquired the status of a highly-valued art form actively practised by all social groups. Referring to Charlotte Raa's courageous initiative, Aleksis Kivi wrote that "lacking men's fatuous self-satisfaction, women usually accomplish what they set out to do".

Before the turn of the century, in all the Scandinavian countries, great actresses had a remarkable influence on the fortunes of the theatre and inspired many young playwrights. During the "naturalism" period, the theatre helped to highlight many social problems. The status allotted to women by society became, through the theatre, the subject of general and occasionally heated discussion. In this connexion, no play has stirred as much passion as Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. A hundred years ago the character of Nora was at the centre of the argument as to whether it was possible for a woman to make decisions about her own life, her duties and her responsibilities.

At the end of the nineteenth century, following in Ibsen's footsteps, Minna Canth, "the harsh Amazon of literature" as she was called, wrote plays depicting uncompromisingly the wretched condition of working women tormented by unfaithful, drunken men. She also exposed the hypocrisy of the rich and the engrained, superficial ways of the bourgeoisie, although she subsequently adopted a more conciliatory line, recommending family solidarity and mutual tolerance.

The scathing force of her works was not appreciated by all. The management of the theatre which staged her revolutionary play *Children of a Harsh Destiny* cut short its run fearing that the author's ideas would spark off agitation and revolt among the people. In this play Canth portrays various categories of women—mothers, wives and rejected mistresses—while the male characters were good-for-nothings modelled on Zola characters or liberating heroes reminiscent of Schiller's *Brigands*.

The agrarian matriarchy of Finnish society, that peasant cultural tradition dominated by strong women, was portrayed in a remarkable manner in the plays of Hella Wuolijoki at the beginning of this century. Her series of five plays focusses on the history of the country estate of Niskavuori and lays bare the violent moral and economic conflicts smouldering under the apparent serenity of country life. The characters speak of life in Finland in a universal and easily communicable manner and Wuolijoki's plays have been performed in several countries, including the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom.

Wuolijoki was also politically active and circumstances brought her into contact with Bertold Brecht. When the exiled German author and his companions arrived in Finland she welcomed them into her house. This meeting led to a collaborative project the outcome of which was *Mr. Puntila and his Hired Man Matti*, her own version of which Wuolijoki published in Finnish.

Finnish women playwrights of today, like Eeva Liisa Manner in her work *Burnt Sienna Land*, are often concerned with the problems of young girls. Pirkko Saisio's works depict the hidden face of the contemporary welfare society. According to Saisio, women do not succeed in life because they are unable to set themselves well-defined objectives. But, for her, there is no direct relation of cause and effect between the unscrupulousness of men and the weakness of women, such as is portrayed in naturalistic plays. Even while defending women, Saisio also sees man as a victim of circumstances; the faceless economic forces that exert pressure within society do not distinguish between the sexes.

Although in Finland plays written by women are still often produced by men, they tend to arouse particular interest in women directors who are also often involved in producing new

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Laura Jantti's daring feminist production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, staged at the KOM theatre, Helsinki. In Jantti's interpretation, *The Tempest* is the chronicle of a power struggle among women.

Photo © KOM Theatre, Helsinki

interpretations of plays belonging to the great European theatre tradition.

Shakespeare has always fascinated women. During the 1920s, for example, Elli Tompuri drew inspiration from Sarah Bernhardt's work for her production of *Hamlet*. And a few years ago, at the Kom theatre in Finland, the director Laura Jantti transformed Shakespeare's *The Tempest* presenting it as a power struggle among women protagonists. This interpretation was, in fact, a criticism of extremist feminism and aimed to demonstrate that power corrupts regardless of whether it is held by a woman or a man. Laura Jantti added a psychoanalytic and mythocritical touch—Prospero's island symbolized both the subconscious and the totality of the world to which man is linked by his thoughts and by his acts.

The contribution to drama of women who have gained renown in recent years in various sectors of the theatre has been more autonomous than in the past and has been courageously progressive. At the same time, conflict has emerged between objectives and reality; there is not always enough work for actresses and programming policies do not always allow women to expound or to impose their point of view. This has led to the creation of permanent or temporary women's theatre groups ranging from the militant feminist informative theatre to the one-person monologue theatre. Many actresses would like to play more interesting roles than the European theatre, often subject to purely financial goals, is able to offer. Unless strenuous personal and collective efforts are made the woman in the theatre will continue to be an office employee, a ticket vendor, a make-up girl or a prompter, or, if she is in the cast, merely a foil for the male actor, restricted to the role of a sex object.

Nevertheless, women's field of action in the theatre today is no longer so restricted or so tied to certain types of role as in the past; on the contrary, it encompasses the whole range of artistic expression that the world of the theatre affords.

■

CHINA

The symbolic language of Beijing Opera

by Lu Tian

BEIJING Opera, the unique dramatic form which is part of China's great cultural heritage, is today not only popular in China; it has won for itself a special place on the international stage.

In Beijing Opera, the plot, characters, events and setting are all described solely through the acting and singing of the performers, a unique feature which makes the form more comprehensive than operetta, dance drama or spoken drama. This ingenious combination consists of singing, acting, recitation, using skill in martial arts, musical accompaniment and stage design, in order to symbolically reflect rather than imitate real life. The personality, the inner feelings, the development of the plot and the general atmosphere of the performance are all expressed through established and precise codes.

All drama attempts to reflect real life. As a result of different creative resources, different national characteristics, aesthetic judgments, cultures and traditions, a variety of dramatic forms has arisen. In general, contemporary drama has evolved from three different conceptual approaches, that of Stanislavsky which advocates the presentation of reality, that of the great Chinese actor Mei Lanfang which advocates conveying the essence of reality, and that of Brecht which integrates a Stanislavskian "realistic presentation" with Mei Lanfang's "symbolic presentation".

The Stanislavsky method takes "imitation" as a guiding principle and can be traced back to ancient Greece, to Aristotle and the then-prevalent theory that "art imitates nature". The seventeenth century produced the dramatic concept of "constructing a plot set in a fixed place and within one complete day" and the nineteenth century saw the emergence of Ibsen's works of modern drama, all of which inherited much from classical dramatic forms. They treated drama as an imitation of life or a faithful representation of real life with a "fourth wall" * to create an illusion of reality. According to Mei Lanfang and to the theory of Beijing Opera, however, no such "fourth wall" exists. This is a fundamental difference between Beijing Opera and other types of theatre. Mei Lanfang's dramatic theory is that of non-illusionism, quite different from that which advocates the presentation of reality.

The basic aesthetic of Beijing Opera is a theory of "symbolic style", not of "imitation". The beauty of the performance is not found in a simulation of the original appearance or the reproduction of real life. It does not seek superficial similarities but instead uses its symbolic methods to convey a sort of essence or intrinsic spirit of real life. It is a formalization of real life, a code of highly condensed actions intended to produce concrete and exact images in the audience's imagination.

During the performance, players and audience together carry out the artistic process, since without the active participation of the audience's imagination the art form would not succeed. For instance, on a stage without props, special movements by the performers can signify such actions as opening or closing a door, riding in a carriage or on a horse, or rowing a boat. As Mei Lanfang once said, "The performer is in possession of all the necessary props".

In *The Crossroad,* for example, two performers use stylized movements to show two men fighting in the dark. Under a bright spotlight, the acting of the performers draws the audience into this drama taking place on a dark night. A performer walking in a circle indicates a long journey from point A to point B. If the performer raises his sleeves to cover his face and then sings a solo, delivers a soliloquy or a *bei gong* (aside), it indicates that he is in a different location from others who, though on the same stage, are not supposed to hear him.

In literary terms, the scripts belong more to the category of "open theatre" than to the Ibsen-type "closed theatre". Some are written in the first person, but in the majority third-person narrative is used to describe the characters and develop the plot. In *Wronged Su San,* for instance, the wronged courtesan Su San is escorted to the provincial capital to stand trial. While on her way to the capital she sings: "Su San has left Hongdong county and is on the way...", thus describing the setting. Highly flexible, Beijing Opera is thus not restricted by time and space, and performances can suggest "broad expanses of water with fish swimming about or vast open plains with birds flying in the sky".

In order to accommodate this "open theatre" type of script and resolve the inherent contradiction between interpretation and consistency of performance, a set of dramatic conventions has been derived from life, stylized and standardized artistic expressions which create both aural and visual images through music and dance.

Traditionally, roles in Beijing Opera are classified into *sheng* (male roles), *dan* (female roles), *jing* (the "painted face" male roles, most of which have special personalities or features), and *chou* (the clowns). Each of these has its own set of stage movements and styles of expression. The *long tao* role can be performed by one actor who represents a number of attendants or soldiers. Four soldiers and four generals on either side of the stage symbolize an army several thousand strong. *Qi ba* is a type of dance which symbolizes a general full of energy before an expedition; *zhou bian* indicates walking at night; *tang ma* riding in the field, etc.

All these conventions are of course unlike real life, but as Goethe said: "Once the artist grasps the object, that object will no longer belong to nature." Beijing Opera, through this standardization or codification of life creates a highly distinctive form of expression, an image which is acceptable to and acknowledged by the audience.

There are two categories of symbolic convention: one type is metonymic and adheres strictly to an established pattern of movement; for instance, the actor may dance carrying an oar to represent rowing a boat and the audience will automatically understand even ▶

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** The "fourth wall is a concept of the naturalistic theatre, according to which the proscenium arch represents the fourth wall of the room in which the action of the play takes place, removed for the benefit of the audience but without any of the performers taking cognizance of the fact.*

The horn-like feathers this character from *Meeting of Heroes* is holding in his mouth signify anger and determination. The dragon design on his costume, in this performance by the Beijing Opera, indicates that he is an intellectual.

Photo Fred Mayer © Magnum, Paris

Chen Miao Chang, a Taoist nun, has boarded a fishing boat in pursuit of her lover, Pan Bizheng, a young scholar, in this performance of *Autumn River* by the Sichuan Opera, whose acting style is patterned on that of the Beijing Opera.

Photo © Chinese edition of the *Unesco Courier*

▶ though there is no boat on stage. The second type is totally without any stage props. In a scene in *Song Jiang Slays Yan Poxi,* for instance, Song Jiang goes upstairs to meet his mistress Yan. On the stage there is no prop to represent the stairs and the actor stands in the centre of the stage swinging his "rippling sleeves" and holding up the hem of his robe to simulate the movement of climbing stairs.

The powerful, rhythmic music of Beijing Opera also has conventions which are understood by the audience. The musical modes consist mainly of *er huang,* to express a melancholic mood, contemplation, recollection or yearning, or of *xi pi,* to express excitement and liveliness. The percussion instruments play their traditional roles: *si ji tou* (four beats on a gong) is generally used when the actor first comes on stage, or is about to exit, or is performing without words; *luan chui* (confused beats of gong and cymbals) expresses confusion, defeat or the tense atmosphere of battle, but with additional drum beats it can also express the sound effects of a conflagration or a storm. In addition there are symbolic sound effects such as flowing water (indicated by beating a small gong), the watchman's clapper, or wind, rain and snow, as well as the roaring of tigers, the neighing of horses and the singing of birds. They are not intended to be realistic reproductions of the actual sounds.

Stage design is also executed through the use of particular conventions which combine visual images with conceptual images. Clouds, water, wind and fire, for instance, are all natural phenomena. On the Beijing Opera stage they are represented either by boards painted with moving clouds, or flags painted with flowing water or rustling wind or burning fire. By carrying these boards and flags the performers are able to suggest various changes in natural phenomena.

Characterization is also ruled by conventions. It is interesting to study the "painted face" (a special type of make-up) in Beijing Opera, because no precedent in daily life can be traced. The different colours of the "painted faces" represent different personalities, red for loyalty, white for treachery, black for courage, yellow for cruelty, blue for staunchness, and so on. The audience can easily recognize the character by his make-up.

The costumes are fundamentally a synthesis of ancient costumes developed for the aesthetic requirements of the performance. The basic feature is an ample, exaggerated shape which suits the roles by conveying strong dramatic effects, different from ballet costumes which show the beauty of the human body. A clown has a hanging beard with its lower tuft dropping downward over his chest; *lao sheng* (aged and bearded male characters) wear a jade belt loosely over the ceremonial robe; *wu sheng* (military male characters) have long sashes which hang at the front of the actor's waist.

To sum up, Beijing Opera performances, scripts, music and stagecraft are all fundamentally unrealistic. The symbolism of the performance, with its various conventions and devices, is interpreted and understood by the audience. The ordinary actions of real life are "distilled" and transformed into drama on the stage of Beijing Opera.

■ **Lu Tian**

Scene from *The Story of Liwa,* a traditional Chinese opera performed here by the Chong Qing Opera Company.

Photo Ariane Bailey, Unesco

UNITED STATES

Alternative theatre

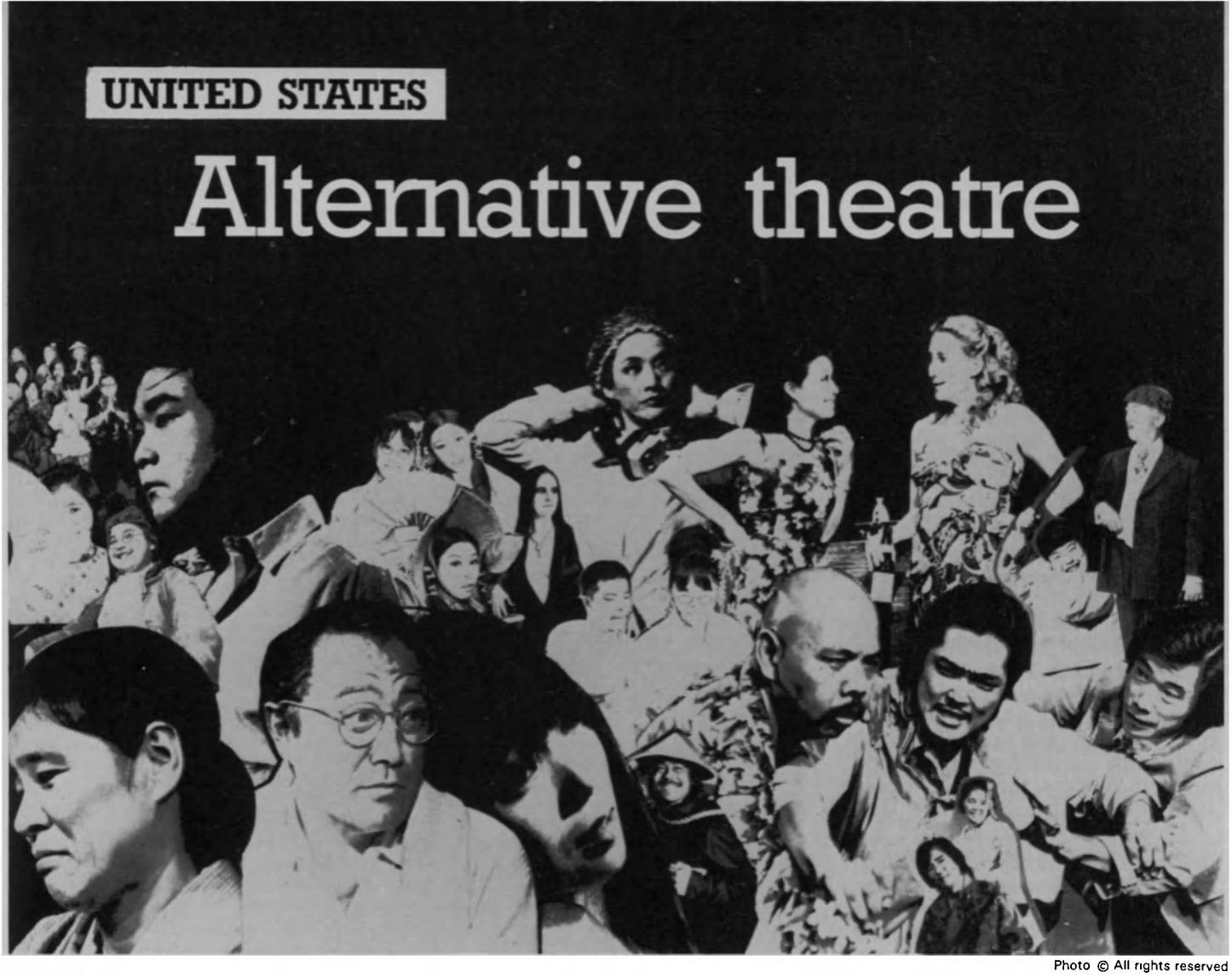


Photo © All rights reserved

A collage of photos of actors appearing in various plays put on at the East West Theatre, New York.

by Eric Oatman

SOMEONE wishing to find out how the United States changed over the past twenty years would be wise to visit the nation's alternative theatres. In 1963, for example, Black playwrights had few outlets, although Black Americans made up nearly 11 percent of the nation's population. Today, nearly every major city has at least one showcase for Black writers, who in two decades have created an impressive body of dramatic literature.

Other groups to whom the theatre was virtually closed twenty years ago have managed to plant their feet firmly on the stage. Among them are Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans, feminists, and homosexuals, and radical political groups that use the theatre—sometimes with extraordinary inventiveness—to call attention to their views. Even handicapped minorities, such as the deaf, have learned to make the theatre's special language work for them.

ERIC OATMAN *is a US journalist, based in New York, with a special interest in education and the arts. He is the editor of* Scholastic Search, *a magazine on American history, and has published several works of fiction and non-fiction.*

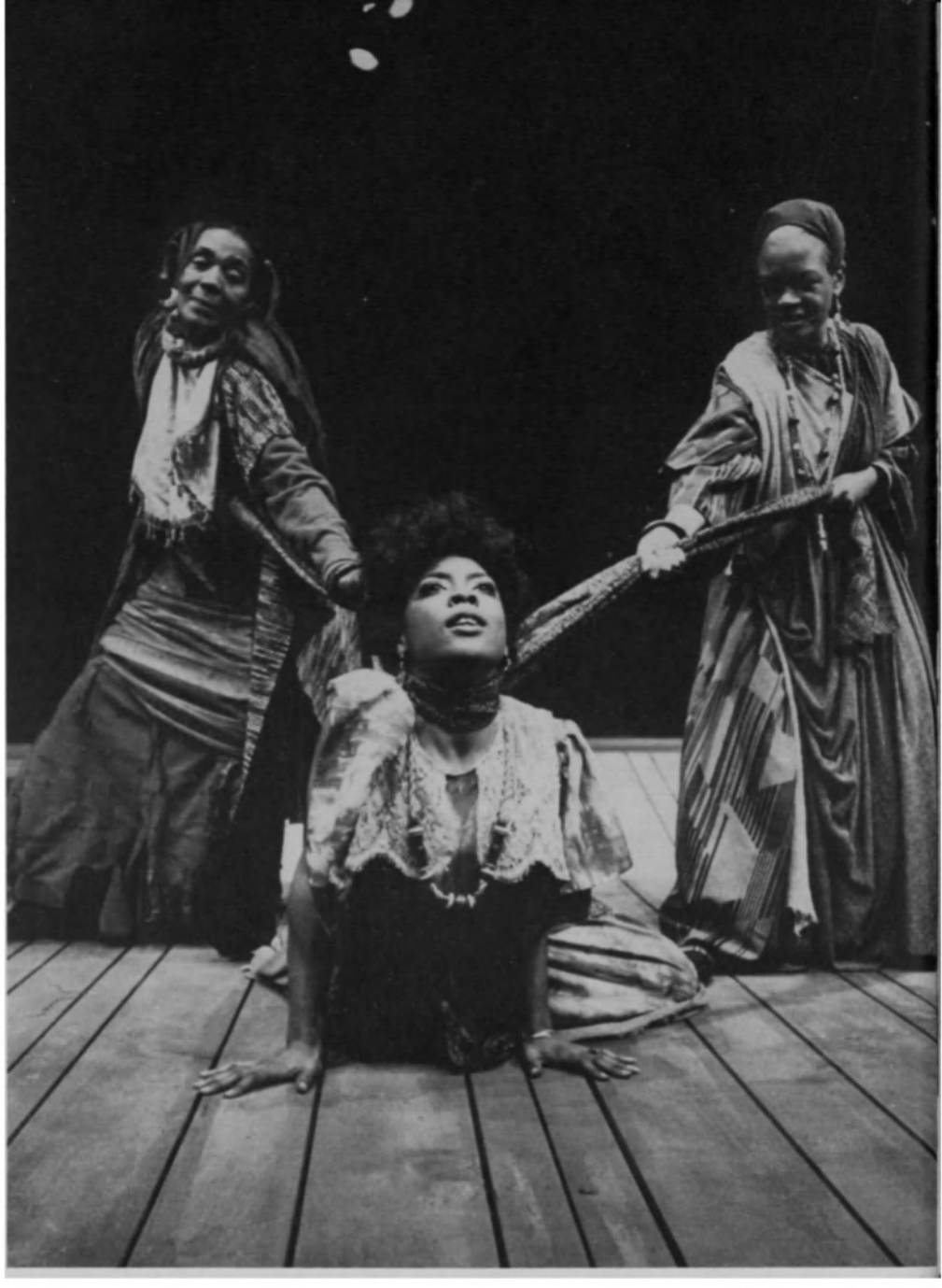
But the historical lessons of a burgeoning advocacy theatre are not the only ones that the nation's non-profit theatre has to offer. A good portion of today's alternative theatre groups look inward, testing the ability of new aesthetic structures to frame and illuminate human experience. Here, too, in the ways we see and feel, there have been enormous changes, all of which are being charted by experimentalists clustered, for the most part, in the cities of San Francisco and New York.

Fittingly, it was a time of social and intellectual upheaval that gave birth to the alternative theatre. Those most alienated from the dominant culture of the 1960s—hippies, political radicals, anti-war and civil rights activists—vowed to reshape the nation's consciousness. Some chose theatre as their weapon and trained themselves to use it.

Simultaneously, among a handful of theatre professionals in New York, another alternative movement took flight. Frustrated by the commercial theatre's fear of risk, it began staging offbeat plays in coffee houses such as La Mama Experimental Theater Club and Caffe Cino.

When the impulses to make the U.S. over and revitalize its theatre merged, powerful energies were released. One group, Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theater, turned conventional notions of theatre upside down. Their lengthy, plotless, cast-developed productions shaped theatrical styles that today's groups continue to explore. They performed political theatre, street theatre, and environmental theatre, mingling performers and spectators while offering a choice of activities to focus on. Sometimes, the Living Theater's experiments even resembled those chaotic, mixed-media "happenings" that have resurfaced on the farthest shores of the current alternative theatre scene as performance art.

The sheer number of alternative theatre groups today—New York city alone boasts well over 100—makes most generalizations about them half-truths. Still, today's alternative theatre *is* quieter than the one that exploded into the 1960s. For one thing, the political issues that fuelled the movement in its earlier days are no longer on everyone's agenda. For another thing, the national economy, more fragile now than it has been in forty years, has made *caution* a byword among alter- ▶



Members of the Negro Ensemble Company in a production of Ray Aranha's *Sons and Fathers of Sons*, at Theatre Four, New York.

Photo © Bert Andrews, New York

native theatre people. Their survival these days largely depends on an evaporating pool of government and corporate subsidies.

Locating funds has always been toughest for minority groups, which is why the Black theatre movement has failed to grow deep roots inside Black communities. Ten years ago, there may have been more than 200 Black theatres; today, less than half of them survive, and to do so most have had to find ways to lure white audiences.

The most visible Black theatre company is New York's Negro Ensemble Company (N.E.C.), which in seventeen years has consistently proven its worth as a training ground for Black theatre people. In January, the N.E.C. closed Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play* after a 14-month run that garnered the author the nation's top drama award, the Pulitzer Prize.

The N.E.C. is one of the few Black theatres that white critics visit regularly (it is not in a Black community), and for this reason many white theatregoers rarely hear of the vital work being done elsewhere. In New York alone, two other institutions play commanding roles. One, the Frank Silvera Writer's Workshop, is in the Black ghetto of Harlem, and the other, the New Federal Theater, is in a racially-mixed neighbourhood a good distance from the commercial theatre district. The Workshop has developed more than 1,000 plays by Black writers over the past ten years, and Woodie King, Jr., who heads the New Federal, has been nurturing Black plays since the mid-1960s.

For the Black audiences, the movement's centre is wherever they are: at Philadelphia's Freedom Theater, Chicago's Kuumba Theater Workshop, San Francisco's Lorraine Hansberry Theater, Baltimore's Arena Players, Atlanta's Just Us... The list goes on and on.

Among other minority groups, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans have been the most successful in carving out places for themselves in the American theatre. Asian Americans have set up companies in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York to provide forums for their playwrights and to present works that reflect their audiences' unique experiences in the U.S.

Several theatre groups nourish the cultural pride of Chicanos, people of American Indian and Spanish extraction. The best known of these groups is El Teatro Campesino, which a young actor named Luis Valdez founded in 1965 to aid a union that was organizing farmworkers in California. Valdez moved from writing *actos*—skits to inspire social action—to the more spiritual *mitos*, which were dramatizations of Mayan and Aztec myths. Today, his group is experimenting with *corridos*, staged ballads that chronicle the lives of people on both sides of the Mexican-U.S. border.

In political theatre, few groups have been more tenacious than the San Francisco Mime Troupe, which was formed in 1959. In 1969 the group became a collective and began using its robust, outdoor performance styles to focus attention on social issues ranging from sexism to, this past year, the U.S. role in Central America.

Feminism has become a respectable topic in the commercial theatre with three plays sinking their teeth into it this season in New York. Encouraged, alternative groups continue to supply fresh material. In San Francisco, Lilith—A Women's Theater just staged a play on choices that revolutionary women are faced with, and New York's Women's Project unveiled a play about two "abnormal" women: the American suffragist, Susan B. Anthony, and Joan of Arc. The hardest-hitting of the women's groups, the Spiderwoman Theater Workshop, weaves its members' personal stories into bawdy explorations of women and violence.

On first sight, Mill Valley, a sleepy suburb of San Francisco, is an unlikely place to begin an investigation of the radical aesthetics of today's experimen-

Scene from Alan Finneran's *The Man in the Nile at Night* (1980) at the Soon 3 Theatre, New York.

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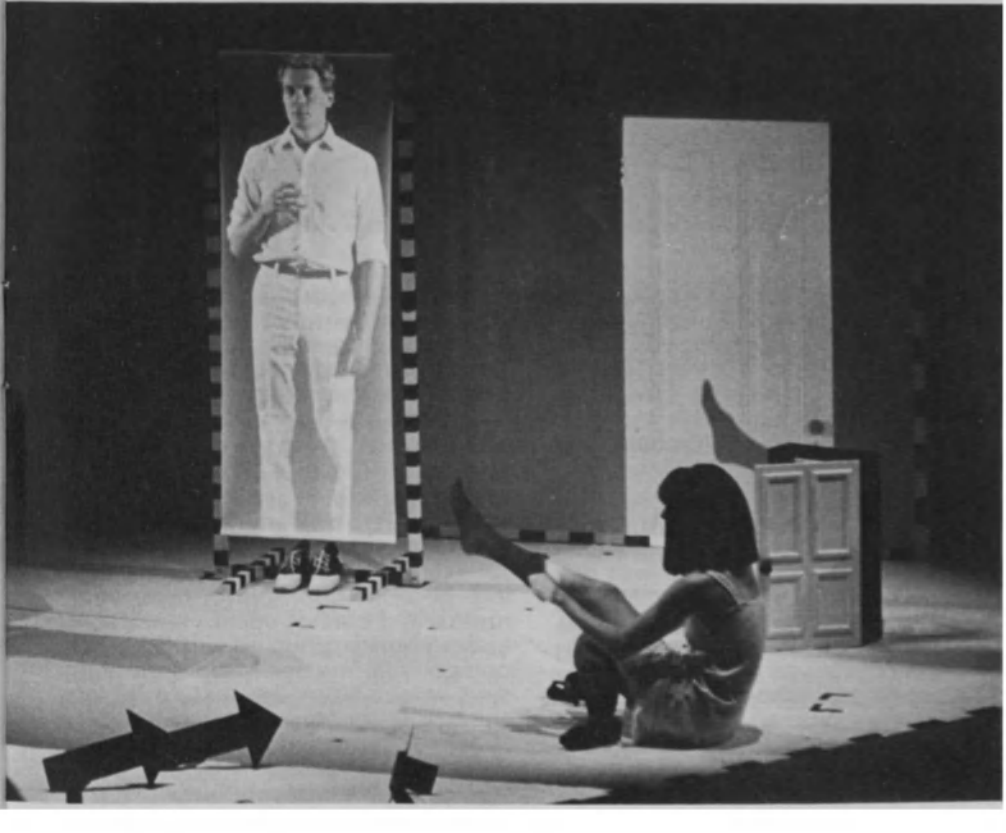

Ellen McElduff of the Mabou Mines group in a production of *Dead End Kids: A History of Nuclear Power,* by JoAnne Akalaitis. Mabou Mines is one of the most exciting experimental groups in the United States today.

Photo © Carol Rosegg, New York

talists. But there, in a former post office, Chris Hardman's Antenna Company has created a play in which audience members are the only actors. Hardman, a visual artist who moved naturally from carnival funhouse design to environmental theatre, equips each spectator with a miniature tape player and earphones and sends him, alone, through a maze of seventeen settings. Following pre-recorded instructions to sit, kneel, lie down, pick up props, and so forth, the spectator becomes the criminal hero of this walk-through theatre piece, which Hardman calls *Artery.*

Another San Francisco group that plugs into new technologies is Alan Finneran's Soon 3. For more than a decade, Finneran has been mixing drama, sculpture, painting, and film to create "performance landscapes"—places where actors (and machines) perform tasks according to Finneran's intuitive design. In 1981, he added music and an organizing theme: violence as an "illusionary product" of California's movie industry.

Women are at the forefront of the avant-garde in San Francisco. Bean Finneran, Alan's wife, will travel this spring with *Red Rain,* a visual theatre piece about having and living with children. In New York, Elizabeth LeCompte's Wooster Group, housed in a former truck garage, mounted the first part of a visual and verbal collage, *LSD,* in January and February this year, then left for three months in the Netherlands, where they will create a fantasy musical, *North Atlantic.* In *LSD,* characters are apt to deliver their lines either in slow motion or so fast that only the emotions behind them are communicated.

Squat Theater, a Hungarian company that has lived in New York since 1977, has been performing *Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free* before the curtained window of the group's ground-floor storefront. When the curtains are raised, the troupe operates on two stages at once: one inside the building, the other on the busy sidewalk outside, where passersby become unwitting actors in this earthy and surreal concoction.

More and more, groups today seem to be working toward Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* a performance which unites all art forms. Yet few seem able to integrate the forms as well as Mabou Mines, the seven-member collaborative for which Lee Breuer and

CONTINUED PAGE 46

THAILAND

The theatre of kings

by Manas Chitakasem

LIKE most Thai art forms, Thai theatre originated in the court under the patronage of ruling monarchs who maintained actors, dancers and musicians for kingly and aristocratic pleasure. In addition, dramatic texts were produced in the royal court and the kings themselves often took part in their composition.

Traditionally, theatrical performances and ancillary entertainments in Thailand were associated with court ceremonies. The generic term for these entertainments is *maho-rasop,* which means "grand spectacle". The Thai chronicles provide us with an extensive list of the occasions on which they were organized: coronations, royal marriages, the ceremony of the royal tonsure, on the capture of a white elephant, at the site of a royal pilgrimage, at annual rites.

Thai classical theatre is generally divided into three types: the *nang* (shadow play), the *khon* (mask drama) and the *lakhon* (dance drama).

The traditional performance of the *nang* is known as *nang yai (nang* means "leather", *yai* means "big"). According to the palatine law of the Ayuthaya period (1458), *nang yai* was an essential entertainment for special occasions such as the capture of a white elephant, the blessing of soldiers and their arms and the founding of a new city. Today *nang yai* has lost its popularity but it has been preserved and revitalized by the National Theatre of the Fine Arts Department.

Nang yai is usually performed in the open air. The size of the screen is 9 × 16 metres, with a transparent section of 8 × 15 metres in the middle, leaving one metre for the surrounding red border. Behind the screen is a torch or more usually today an electric light bulb. Behind the light is a circular white screen to project the light on to the front screen. The puppeteer, who is also a dancer, wears embroidered fabric and a jacket with a high formal collar with a sash around his waist and a headband. During the performance the *nang* figures are held aloft both behind and then in front of the screen by the dancers who dance to the music and the narration.

Nang yai and *khon* use the same story, but in the *khon* the puppeteer, instead of holding the puppet, puts on a mask representing it and dances out the story in front of the *nang yai* screen. Originally *khon* was performed entirely by men who played both male and female roles. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, both men and women appeared on stage together. All players wear masks save those portraying female roles.

The *khon* is renowned for its formalized but vigorous action. Acting and dancing are inseparable, each movement having a definite meaning regulated by the precisely defined music for specific dance and action, for example, walking, marching, crying. Because *khon* performers wear masks and cannot speak, a narrator and a chorus group sit with the accompanying musicians and recite or sing verses from the text to which the actors mime.

The repertoire is entirely drawn from the *Ramakian* (the story of Rama the Famous) but favours

Right, illustration from a Thai manuscript depicting one of the basic dance movements of *Lakhon nai*, a form of Thai dance drama which was performed by all-women casts, inside the royal palace, exclusively for the king and his court.

Far right, scene from a *lakhon phan thang* which relates the story of a Javanese king and queen. *Lakhon phan thang* (dance-drama in a thousand ways) is a modern form of Thai theatre which borrows tunes and dance movements from foreign sources and whose principal ingredients are adventure, romance and melodrama.

Photos courtesy of M Rutnin, London

MANAS CHITAKASEM, *of Thailand, is professor of Thai at the School of Oriental and African Studies, in London. He is the author of a number of published works on Thai language and culture.*

episodes involving combat and battle scenes depicting a victory for morality—good always triumphs over evil. Costumes are elaborate and the main characters are identifiable by the dominant colours of their costumes and masks. Rama wears deep green, his younger brother yellow, and Hanuman, the monkey-general, white. In contrast to the costumes, the *khon* stage is generally bare.

Like the *khon,* the *lakhon* is a dance drama but performers do not wear masks, except those playing the parts of monkeys, ogres and other non-human non-celestial beings. The *lakhon* was divided into two types, the *lakhon nai* and the *lakhon nok (nai* = inside, *nok* = outside), a split which may have occurred as early as the seventeenth century.

Lakhon nai was performed inside the palace using only female players. Dancers for *lakhon nai* were originally the consorts and female attendants of the king and, very likely, they represented the celestial dancers of the god-king. *Lakhon nai* was therefore a royal prerogative and performed exclusively for the king. The music has a definite convention expressed in specific musical tunes for specific actions or emotions. Thus a particular musical theme will signal, for example, the rally of an army, a march, a forest scene or a love scene. The dance, the music and the text are closely linked through the medium of the chorus.

Outside the palace only *lakhon nok* could be performed, and since women performers were reserved exclusively for palace dance drama, the *lakhon nok* could only employ men players. The dance, songs and music tend to be quick and the comic character plays an important role, provoking hilarity among the audience. Stories for *lakhon nok* are drawn from local legends and tales together with many *jataka* stories (stories of the former lives of the Buddha).

In the mid-nineteenth century, King Rama IV gave permission for female *lakhon* to be performed outside the grand palace. As a result *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok* acquired some common features. The players could be either men or women, or both, appearing on stage together, and performances could take place either inside or outside the royal court. Only the original purpose of the two forms was preserved, the *lakhon nok* being performed purely for entertainment and amusement whereas the *lakhon nai* was acted primarily for its aesthetic beauty.

During the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), the steadily growing impact of Western political and economic pressures caused the Thai authorities not only to make a positive approach to the threat by pursuing policies of political and economic adaptation and conciliation, but also to encourage appreciation and understanding of the values of their own culture in a far more conscious way than had hitherto been necessary.

The desire for a greater knowledge of Thailand's own heritage was strong and the process of reform and modernization introduced by Rama V had a great impact on development and innovation in Thai theatre. There was, for example, the revival of *khon* and *lakhon* and a more general expansion of dramatic literature. Most significant, however, was the introduction of a new form of drama under Western influence. Three new types of *lakhon* emerged—*lakhon rong, lakhon dukdamban* and *lakhon phan thang.*

The influence of Western opera was evident in the *lakhon rong* (singing dance drama) where, for example, the story of Madame Butterfly was given the setting of Chiangmai, a northern province of Thailand. Whereas the essential elements of the traditional dance drama were preserved, there were innovations in the music, dialogues, plots, dance movements, costumes and set designs. Actors sang their parts and spoke the dialogues in prose.

Lakhon dukdamban (named after the theatre where its first performance took place) is a classic example of a transformation of traditional Thai elements into a more modern form whilst preserving everything essentially Thai, so that the new form remains Thai. The stories for *lakhon dukdamban* are taken from the dance drama but condensed to suit performances lasting one or two hours. Costumes are traditional with head-dresses and embroidered garments but the poetic texts are modernized with new tunes. Actors sing and dance at the same time without any chorus or narration. Important innovations are the stage settings, elaborate painted scenes with realistic designs. New methods and techniques of stage design, including Western perspective painting of scenery, are among the major contributions of *lakhon dukdamban* to modern Thai theatre.

The third type of *lakhon* created during this period was *lakhon phan thang* (dance-drama in a thousand ways). This type of *lakhon* inclines towards adventurous romance and melodrama. The plays often take place in foreign lands or in regions of Thailand with romantic scenery and local colour. It introduces many new types of story from Thai and foreign tales in order to give an exotic flavour to the *lakhon.*

When the absolute monarchy came to an end in 1932, classical theatre lost its royal sponsorship, but it continued to survive under the various post-revolutionary governments. During the world wars, theatrical productions were used as propaganda, producing several patriotic *lakhon* of various types. Today, the pace of the dances, the singing and the texts has quickened to suit the rapid rhythm of modern life.

Significantly, the various dramatic elements peculiar to the different genres have become intermixed; the *khon,* for example, now employs many movements, musical airs and songs from the *lakhon*, and many songs written for *lakhon dukdamban* are now used in *khon* performances instead of the traditional script. *Khon* stage and scenery have been modernized and the performances now concentrate on dramatic action, interpretation of the text and lighting effects as well as on the suitability of dance movements rather than on the traditional beauty and refinement of the classical dance. ■

Alternative theatre

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

JoAnne Akalaitis have written memorable works. The group is now putting together Bill Raymond's *Cold Harbor,* a biographical study of Ulysses S. Grant, an army general who became U.S. President in 1869. The work continues the study of short-sighted but world-shaking decisions which Mabou Mines began with Akalaitis's *Dead End Kids: A History of Nuclear Power.*

Another work scheduled to open this spring in New York is Richard Foreman's *Egyptology,* said to involve American soldiers, World War II, dreams, and contacts with exotic cultures. *Dreams* is probably the key word here. In his Ontological/Hysteric theatre, Foreman eschewed conventional story lines in favour of elaborate visual and aural presentations of thought processes, usually his own.

The most ambitious avant-garde project in the works—ever—is Robert Wilson's extravaganza, *The Civil Wars: A Tree is Best Measured When it is Down.* Wilson is the world's best-known dramatic formalist, a former painter and architect whose concern in theatre, like Foreman's, is with structure. His last large work, operatic in scale, was the five-hour *Einstein on the Beach,* which toured Europe in 1976.

The Civil Wars, nine hours on the theme of the brotherhood of man, should dwarf *Einstein.* Wilson will create its many parts in seven countries and bring them all together in June, 1984, at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, California.

Wilson is best known outside the U.S., so it seems appropriate that most of the funding for *The Civil Wars* will come from abroad. Inside the U.S., where only about one percent of the population patronizes *any* live theatre, experimentalists tend to get overlooked by all but a small band of critics and followers.

■ **Eric Oatman**

The International Theatre Institute

The Unesco-sponsored International Theatre Institute was founded in 1948 with the aim of promoting international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts (including music theatre and dance) as a means of consolidating peace and friendship between peoples, deepening mutual understanding, and increasing creative co-operation between all theatre people. Among its activities are World Theatre Day (27 March) and a wide range of seminars and workshops. Themes of seminars held in 1982 included "Stanislavsky's heritage and the Development of the Soviet Multi-National Theatre" (in Tashkent), "Composer and Librettist" (Prague), and "Indian Dance Traditions and Modern Theatre" (Calcutta). The Institute also organizes the Theatre of Nations which was until 1973 based in Paris, but is now itinerant and held every two years. Forty-five companies from 32 countries took part in last year's Theatre of Nations, held at Sofia, Bulgaria. The Institute also publishes a lively quarterly magazine, *Theatre International,* which is dedicated to the exchange of theatre work and experience worldwide. The magazine is bilingual (English-French) with abstracts of articles in Spanish, Russian and Arabic. Articles in recent issues have included "Lee Strasberg: the Master and the Method", "The Tibetan Theatre of China", "Dance Theatre in Ethiopia", "Stanislavski's Method of Physical Analysis" and "The Raun Raun Theatre of Papua New Guinea".

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They've got us taped

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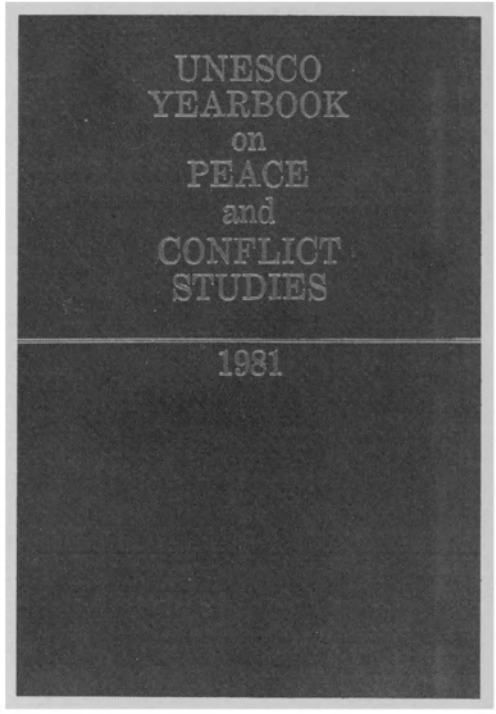

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The street's the stage at carnival time

Nowhere more than in Latin America today, from Rio de Janeiro to Oruro, and throughout the Caribbean, carnival is the occasion for a colourful, effervescent explosion of joie de vivre. Its origins are remote. In medieval Europe at carnival time mimes would parade the streets for days on end in a dramatic pageant in which performers and spectators alike enjoyed the release of saturnalia and mocked at morality and religious institutions. Italian carnivals such as the still-celebrated carnival of Venice moderated this anti-Christian spirit. Photo shows a scene from the 1981 carnival in Trinidad.

Photo: Lee Querry, Rapi